



## Turning Promises into Progress:

Gender equality and rights for women and girls -  
lessons learnt and actions needed

March 2015

## Credits

*Turning Promises into Progress Report* Gender and Development Network, Gender Action for Peace and Security, UK SRHR Network, London, March 2015.

A summary briefing *Turning Promises into Progress Briefing* is available at [www.gadnetwork.org](http://www.gadnetwork.org) and [www.gaps-uk.org](http://www.gaps-uk.org).

This report has been produced through a collaborative effort between GADN, GAPS and the UKSRHR network; a wide number of groups and organisations contributed, and the report does not necessarily reflect the full views of any one member organisation or network. GADN, GAPS and the SRHR Network would like to thank all who contributed to the report.

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Sections in Part two were led by: Women, peace and security - GAPS; Violence against women and girls - GADN VAWG working group; SRHR – UKSRHR network; Political participation and influence – GADN Women’s Political Participation working group; Education – GADN Girls’ Education working group; Women’s Economic Justice – GADN Economic Justice working group; Unpaid care – GADN secretariat; Social norms – GADN secretariat.

## The Gender and Development Network (GADN)

GADN brings together expert NGOs, consultants, academics and individuals committed to working on gender, development and women’s rights issues. Our vision is of a world where social justice and gender equality prevail and where all women and girls are able to realise their rights free from discrimination. Our goal is to ensure that international development policy and practice promotes gender equality and women’s and girls’ rights. Our role is to support our members by sharing information and expertise, to undertake and disseminate research, and to provide expert advice and comment on government policies and projects.

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## **Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS)**

GAPS is the UK's only Women, Peace and Security civil society network. We are an expert membership organisation with 17 members who encompass a range of development, human rights, women's rights, humanitarian and peacebuilding NGOs. Founded on the basis of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, we promote, facilitate and monitor the meaningful inclusion of gender perspectives in all aspects of UK government peace and security policy and practice. Through advocacy, campaigning and research, GAPS bridges the gap between the realities of women in conflict-affected countries, and decision makers and practitioners.

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The UKSRHR Network brings together over fifty NGOs and academic institutions as well as individuals from across the UK international development sector, in order to promote the centrality of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in development policies and programmes, particularly with the UK government and its related decision making bodies. Informed by the International Conference for Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action and subsequent regional and international commitments, the Network exists to promote, protect and improve access to SRHR for all people. This is achieved through working with and monitoring the UK government and its institutional progress on realisation of SRHR, advocating on key focus areas and influence key policy processes, acting a source of information and guidance on SRHR policy and practice, and broadening the network by involving a new range of stakeholders.

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## **Front cover**

To mark International Women's Day and to demand political and policy response to their demands, women led a sit-in protest in Bhopal, India.

Photo credit: Srikanth Kolari/ActionAid 2011.

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# Acronyms

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| AWID .....     | Association for Women's Rights in Development                                 |
| AIDS .....     | Acquired immune deficiency syndrome   |
| BPfA .....     | Beijing Platform for Action   |
| CEDAW .....    | UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women |
| CESCR .....    | Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights                              |
| CSOs .....     | Civil society organisations   |
| CSW .....      | The Commission on the Status of Women   |
| DDR .....      | Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration                                 |
| DFID .....     | UK Department for International Development                                   |
| FGM .....      | Female genital mutilation   |
| GADN .....     | Gender and Development Network  |
| GAPS .....     | Gender Action for Peace and Security  |
| GBV .....      | Gender-based violence   |
| HIV .....      | Human immunodeficiency virus  |
| ICPD .....     | International Conference for Population and Development                       |
| IDPs .....     | Internally displaced people   |
| ILO .....      | International Labour Organization   |
| INGOs .....    | International non-governmental organisations                                  |
| IPV .....      | Intimate partner violence   |
| MDGs .....     | Millennium Development Goals  |
| NAPs .....     | National Action Plans   |
| NATO .....     | North Atlantic Treaty Organization  |
| NGOs .....     | Non-governmental organisations  |
| ODA .....      | Official development assistance   |
| ODI .....      | Overseas Development Institute  |
| OECD .....     | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development                        |
| OECD DAC ..... | OECD Development Assistance Committee   |
| PSVI .....     | The Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative                         |
| SIGI .....     | OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index                                   |
| SRH .....      | Sexual and reproductive health  |
| SRHR .....     | Sexual and reproductive health and rights                                     |
| STI .....      | Sexually transmitted infection  |
| SVC .....      | Sexual violence in conflict   |
| UKSRHR .....   | UK Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights network                          |
| UNESCO .....   | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization              |
| UNFCCC .....   | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change                         |
| UNFPA .....    | United Nations Population Fund  |
| UNGEI .....    | United Nations Girls' Education Initiative                                    |
| UNHCR .....    | The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees               |
| UNSCR .....    | United Nations Security Council Resolution                                    |
| VAWG .....     | Violence against women and girls  |
| WASH .....     | Water, sanitation and hygiene   |
| WEE .....      | Women's economic equality   |
| WHO .....      | World Health Organisation   |
| WPS .....      | Women, peace and security   |

## Introduction and summary

Gender inequality remains one of the most shocking injustices of our time. In every country in the world women and girls are discriminated against and denied their rights solely because of their gender. They are disproportionately represented amongst the poorest and most marginalised and excluded people, and have less power, fewer resources, and less voice than men and boys.

2015 represents an important moment to reflect on what has been achieved over the last two decades for gender equality and women's and girls' rights, and to garner renewed momentum to implement existing commitments. It is twenty years since the Fourth World Conference on Women resulted in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, with its comprehensive government commitments under 12 critical areas of concern. It is also the fifteenth anniversary of ground-breaking United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 which recognised the importance of women's full and equal participation as actors for peace and security. Furthermore, 2015 represents a pivotal moment in the development agenda with the advent of the post-2015 framework and sustainable development goals. This year therefore provides an opportunity to turn the commitments already made into real action on the ground in order to advance gender equality and women and girls' rights.

As we show in Part one there have been hard won gains, particularly in the areas where the Millennium Development Goals brought funding, but much more needs to be done. Progress has been slow and uneven and interventions have been piecemeal. New recognition and rhetoric has failed to bring real change, and resources continue to be scarce. A focus on opportunities for individual girls and women has obscured the underlying power inequality between women and men that is the real barrier to gender equality.

Part two looks at progress and challenges across eight areas relevant to gender equality: women, peace and security; violence against women and girls; sexual and reproductive health and rights; political participation and influence; education; women's economic equality; unpaid care and social norms. Every woman and girl experiences discrimination differently, and resources should be particularly focused on those facing multiple discriminations such as on the basis of their income, sexuality, ethnic group or disability. But there are also shared realities, universal themes and common lessons. Most striking is the need to tackling the underlying barriers that perpetuate gender equality and prevent transformative change. Unequal power relations between genders are a fundamental way in which societies are organised; yet failure to recognise these social relationships has led women and girls to be labelled as a 'vulnerable group' to be protected. In this way, the status quo remains unchanged and discriminatory social norms and unjust social and economic structures continue to hinder progress.

In Part three we outline emerging solutions, looking both at the ways in which the structural barriers to gender equality can be tackled, and at how to leverage the necessary political will and resources to achieve this much needed transformational change.

As experts and advocates in different areas of gender equality and women's rights we have come together to lay out our analysis of what has happened over the last twenty years, and identify priorities for the next decades. This report is shaped by our areas of expertise, and of that of the organisations we work with globally. It is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of all issues that are critical for gender equality and the advancement of women's and girls' rights but as one contribution to the call for action.

The Gender and Development Network (GADN) is a UK-based network of INGOs and experts working in the field of gender and international development. Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) is the UK's Women, Peace and Security civil society network, which promotes, facilitates and monitors the meaningful inclusion of gender perspectives in policy and practice on peace and security. The UKSRHR network aims to promote the centrality of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in development policies and programmes.

As the post-2015 agenda is agreed and implemented, and action against commitments made at Beijing and in UNSCR 1325 are reviewed, we call on international institutions, governments, the private sector and INGOs to make gender equality and the rights of women and girls a priority. There is a wealth of information and understanding globally which should be utilised to shape the best way forward and to drive transformative change for women and girls.

The time is now. Over the last twenty years a plethora of international commitments has been put in place, technical expertise has been developed, and political will has even been generated. The next decade must be the one in which we move from isolated action in a few areas to prioritising the underlying causes of inequality and tackling the unequal power relations between women and men, boys and girls. Only then will gender equality be achieved, and the rights of women and girls secured.

# Part one: Twenty years after Beijing – progress and disappointment

*“Today, we still aspire for a world...where women in our diversity and everywhere enjoy our human rights, realise our full potential, and are fully respected members of society; a world in which our lifestyles, economies and relations contribute to the harmony of society, ecology and human wellbeing. We want a world free of violence; a world of peace, where democracy thrives and women can enjoy and exercise their full rights as citizens; a world of accountability for all and by all.”*

Geneva NGO Forum on Beijing+20, Declaration and Recommendations (2014)<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Celebration and frustration

Looking back over the last 20 years there is a cause for both celebration and frustration. Gender equality is now on the political agenda reflected in substantial rhetoric and growing global commitments, such as Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 on gender equality and the numerous UN resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). Since Beijing, donors have increasingly recognised the need to promote gender equality, countries have expanded the scope of women’s legal entitlements in every region of the world and governments have developed national reports on progress, complemented by shadow civil society reports.<sup>2</sup>

There has also been some progress on the ground, particularly in areas such as education, high-level political participation and maternal health, which were prioritised by the MDGs. For example, all regions have achieved, or are close to achieving, gender parity in primary education enrolment. Importantly, these developments have also been coupled with a growing understanding as to what gender equality entails and the most effective ways to get there. An evidence and practice base is gradually emerging, particularly through the work of women’s rights organisations, making the achievement of women’s and girls’ rights and gender equality a measurable and tangible goal.

However, there are still vast areas where little or no progress has been made, including against government commitments in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and WPS resolutions. As we show in Part two, there continues to be widespread violation of women’s and girls’ human rights, and substantial inequality persists, particularly in relation to economic choices, levels of violence and decision making powers. At the same time, discriminatory laws remain and deeply entrenched social norms continue to reinforce and condone the subordinate status of women.

Critically, there has been a failure to understand and tackle the structural causes of gender inequality, to promote women’s and girls’ rights, or to acknowledge the role of current macro-economic policies in perpetuating these injustices. The need to improve

the lives of women and girls is widely acknowledged; but too often this acknowledgment is not turned into action and women and girls are still seen as a ‘vulnerable group’ in need of protection. Instead, we need recognition that women are agents of change and that most societies are structured in ways that compound gender inequality.

The terms ‘gender equality’ and ‘women’s rights’ both imply recognition of the structural power imbalances that exist in all societies and as such are both useful in different ways.

**Gender equality** is the situation where women and men are recognised as equal and are treated equally with the same status, power, resources, responsibilities and opportunities for fulfilling their potential.<sup>3</sup>

**Women’s rights** are basic rights and freedoms that all women and girls are entitled to as human beings enshrined in international agreements and law. This includes entitlements which are not necessarily covered by the term gender equality such as women’s right to live free from fear of gender-based violence (GBV), or to have control over their reproductive lives. The term women’s rights was first used to highlight the specific barriers women and girls face in exercising their rights because of their gender; given the unequal power relations between women and men in all societies it was thought that women’s rights needed to be specifically recognised and fought for.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. What has been achieved?

### 2.1 Increased recognition of gender inequality as an issue

The BPfA represented a turning point in the recognition of women’s rights as human rights, with concrete commitments under 12 critical areas of concern. Reflecting the obligations enshrined in the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), it played an important role in creating political space for discussion of gender equality, with reproductive health and rights at the forefront of an agenda which envisaged equality for women in all aspects of life.

Over the past two decades, this has been followed by various regional and international agreements which have recognised the importance of the realisation of women’s and girls’ rights and gender equality. These range from international commitments such as the ILO Conventions on working women’s rights and the seven UN Security Council resolutions on WPS, to regional agreements including the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) which guarantees comprehensive rights to women including political participation, reproductive rights, and an end to female genital mutilation (FGM), and the recent Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

Around the world, governments have also introduced new legislation, and in some cases new machineries such as women's ministries, protecting or promoting women's and girls' rights and gender equality.

As a result of the persistent work of women's rights advocates, the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) was created in 2011. This represented recognition by UN member states that gender equality is central to achieving all national development goals and that women's and girls' rights are on a par with other imperatives, such as ending poverty and hunger and combatting climate change.<sup>5</sup>

Gender inequality has also been increasingly present in donor rhetoric. The Millennium Declaration in 2000 included a specific goal on gender equality and women's empowerment (MDG 3) and indicators in relation to education, employment and political participation<sup>6</sup>. MDG 5 includes targets on maternal mortality and reproductive health (see box below).<sup>7</sup> Importantly, this political statement spurred new investment in some areas of gender equality and the creation of gender equality-specific funds or budget lines in many donor agencies ranging from the Dutch MDG 3 Fund, to NORAD's dedicated gender budget line, to UN Women's Gender Equality Fund.<sup>8</sup> Most of these new funds went to education and health in line with MDG targets.<sup>9</sup>

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>MDG 3:<br/>Promote<br/>Gender<br/>Equality<br/>and<br/>Empower<br/>Women</b> | <b>Target:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015.</li> </ul>                 | <b>Indicators:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education</li> <li>• Ratio of literate females to males of 15-24 year olds</li> <li>• Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector</li> <li>• Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament</li> </ul> |
| <b>MDG 5:<br/>Improve<br/>Maternal<br/>Health</b>                               | <b>Targets:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.</li> <li>• Achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health.</li> </ul> | <b>Indicators:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maternal mortality ratio</li> <li>• Proportion of deliveries attended by skilled health personnel</li> <li>• Contraceptive prevalence rate</li> <li>• Adolescent birth rate</li> <li>• Antenatal care coverage</li> </ul>   |

Although major gaps in the MDG framework have been acknowledged, the increased international attention, together with the obligation on national governments to report on women's and girls' rights and to track progress against MDG 3 within their national contexts, has made it less common for political actors to openly oppose gender equality and has led to increased commitments (occasionally matched with increased funding). It also acted as a powerful advocacy tool for women's rights organisations and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to hold their governments to account, and promoted inclusion of gender in the broader development agenda.<sup>10</sup>

Recently, there has also been increased recognition that there is inter-connectedness between the ways in which inequality impacts on all aspects of a woman's and girl's life. This has led to an acknowledgement of critical issues, which until recently, have been overlooked or side-lined in development approaches. Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) provides a good example. It has now been widely acknowledged that the failure to address VAWG is a gap in the current MDG framework.<sup>11</sup> The critical role of women in building peace and stability has been further recognised, as is evidenced by seven Security Council Resolutions focussed on the issue.<sup>12</sup> There has also been an increased focus on the specific rights of adolescent girls, a group which has been historically overlooked in work on children's rights and women's rights.

Increasingly, the specific needs of older women and widows are also starting to be recognised.

## **2.2 National governments taking action**

More national governments have now implemented legislation protecting women's and girls' rights and gender equality. For example in 2010, Uganda passed the country's first legislation against domestic violence,<sup>13</sup> while in France in 2014, a broad new gender-equality law eased restrictions on abortion, encouraged paternity leave and promoted gender parity at home and in the workplace.<sup>14</sup> Nearly half of all governments now mandate equal pay for work of equal value and prohibit gender discrimination in hiring, while over 90 percent of governments give women and men equal property ownership rights.<sup>15</sup> In some instances, it is clear that this legislation is having an impact. New inheritance laws in India led to lower dowry payments, delays in marriage for girls, and an increase in the number of years of girls' schooling. However, of course many gaps in national legal frameworks still remain. For example women are still restricted by law from owning assets in at least nine countries.<sup>16</sup>

Some governments have taken this further and used national budgets to promote gender equality. For example, Nepal has introduced gender-responsive budgeting across its government ministries, resulting in an increase in the proportion of funds 'directly responsive' for gender equality from 11 percent in 2007-8 to 19 percent in 2011-12.<sup>17</sup> Ecuador has begun to track and assess how public expenditure contributes to issues such as women's political participation, equal opportunities for work and addressing VAWG.<sup>18</sup>

## **2.3 Some real progress, particularly as a result of the MDGs**

There has been some progress in women's lives, particularly in areas such as education, political participation and maternal health, which were prioritised by the MDGs.

Girls' education has received particular attention and, although gender disparities remain more prevalent at higher levels of education, by 2012 all regions had achieved, or were close to achieving, gender parity in primary education enrolment. For example, in 1990 only 74 girls were enrolled in primary school for every 100 boys in Southern Asia. By 2012, the enrolment ratios were the same for girls as for boys.<sup>19</sup> Women's representation in national parliaments has also improved (See Part two: Section 4 on Political participation). Between 1997 and 2014 the proportion of national parliamentarians who were women had risen from 12 percent to 22 percent. (However, this improvement is from a low base, more than three quarters of parliamentarians in the world are still male, and 37 countries still have less than 10 percent female representation in their parliament).<sup>20</sup> The share of women in non-agricultural sectors has shown less progress and has been increasing slowly over the past two decades - from 35 percent in 1990 to 40 percent in 2012.<sup>21</sup>

The number of women dying in pregnancy and childbirth has almost halved since 1990.<sup>22</sup> In developing countries, the proportion of deliveries attended by skilled health personnel rose from 56 percent in 1990 to 68 percent in 2012. However, there is still a long way to go; in 2013 alone, an estimated 289,000 women died during pregnancy, childbirth or as a result of unsafe abortion.<sup>23</sup> More women now receive antenatal care; but only half of women receive the recommended amount of health care they need.<sup>24</sup> The use of modern contraceptive methods by women in developing countries rose dramatically from negligible levels in the 1960s, but has barely changed over the last decade. Over 222 million women in developing countries still have an unmet need for family planning.<sup>25</sup>

### **3. What has not improved?**

#### **3.1 Substantial inequality persists**

Tragically, substantial gender inequality persists, and women's and girl's rights continue to be violated. Part two contains evidence across eight areas critical to gender equality. For example, one in three women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence.<sup>26</sup> Discriminatory laws persist, in 26 countries statutory inheritance laws differentiate between women and men.<sup>27</sup> Women's voices are also still not heard. A review undertaken of 33 peace negotiations, found that only four percent of participants were women.<sup>28</sup> Deeply entrenched social norms continue to shape society and prevent women and girls from achieving equality with men and boys. Almost everywhere men are seen as the primary income earners and the main decision makers in the household.<sup>29</sup>

Even where there has been progress, this has been uneven. Women and girls in fragile states and conflict settings have largely been excluded from any progress.<sup>30</sup> Poorer women and girls, and those from ethnic minorities, rural areas or who have disabilities have all fared less well in both education and health.<sup>31</sup>

#### **3.2 Rhetoric not matched by resources**

Spending on gender equality as a proportion of official development assistance (ODA) remains disappointingly low, and has not matched the ambition of commitments. In 2012, only 21 percent of ODA went to spending with an element on gender equality, of which only three percent was allocated to projects with gender equality as a principal objective.<sup>32</sup> There is also insufficient resourcing of gender machineries (such as gender ministries) and women's civil society organisations at a national level. Just 1.3 percent of all OECD Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) funds dedicated to gender equality in the 2010 budget went to women's rights organisations and ministries.<sup>33</sup> UN Women, the dedicated UN agency for gender equality, in its first year of operation had a budget of just US\$235 million, which equalled just four percent of the total UN budget for 2011.<sup>34</sup> Funding gaps have been particularly apparent for sexual and reproductive health and women's economic empowerment.<sup>35</sup> New funding should be publically committed to, monitored and tracked with the results published. The OECD DAC

gender equality marker is a useful tracking tool and all ODA should be screened against this marker.

The way that aid is given is also vital. Long-term funding is particularly important for gender equality work, particularly given that changing social norms is a slow process. Yet, the trend in aid modalities is towards an increased role for the private sector. This has involved donors providing large pots of money managed by private companies, and payment according to results. This type of funding poses problems for gender equality work.<sup>36</sup> It makes interventions aimed at longer-term structural and behavioural change less fundable, and reduces the space for women's rights organisations.<sup>37</sup> This trend is compounded by the focus of funders on quantitative results, which often fails to capture the impact that women's organisations have on a woman's life in a meaningful way. The increasing use of competitive tendering as a mechanism for the distribution of aid also favours big national or international organisations rather than small local women's rights organisations.<sup>38</sup>

### **3.3 Lack of focus on collective rights and underlying causes**

The Beijing Declaration clearly articulated a commitment to the full implementation of the human rights of women and girls and the advancement and empowerment of women and girls all over the world.<sup>39</sup> However, this women's rights framing is frequently missing from current approaches, which tend to focus on individual women and girls rather than recognising the underlying causes of gender inequality. There is also a tendency to use an instrumentalist approach with a focus on increasing women's opportunities as a means of benefitting families and wider society and contributing to increased economic growth or peace and security, rather than as a human right and an important end in itself.<sup>40</sup>

The international community's focus has also been on women as a 'vulnerable group.' This was apparent, for example, in the UN Secretary General's Synthesis Report for the post-2015 agenda.<sup>41</sup> This approach fails to recognise that women are active agents of change, mobilising within formal and informal organisations, and has resulted in a tendency to focus on the protection of women and girls rather than addressing unequal power relations.

## **4. Failure to turn rhetoric to reality**

We have seen major shifts in the language and promises of governments and international institutions over the last two decades, without a corresponding dramatic improvement in women's lives. The failure to turn rhetoric to reality is apparent across the eight issue areas covered in Part two, and several common themes emerge. In part three we suggest some ways forward. In particular, we focus on two areas: how to tackle the structural barriers to gender inequality in order to achieve transformative change, and how to garner sufficient resources and political will to ensure these changes happen in order to achieve gender equality and women's and girls' rights.

## Part two: Critical issues: Progress and ways forward

*“...the principle of shared power and responsibility should be established between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities. Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace.”*

Mission statement Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA)<sup>42</sup>

In Part two of the report, we examine eight issue areas on which GADN, GAPS and the UKSRHR Network specialise. Within each, we provide an overview of progress over the past two decades, outline challenges, and propose recommendations for action on gender equality and women’s rights which must be addressed in this critical year and over the decades to come. These recommendations are aimed at the broader international community with relevance primarily to official international institutions and governments but also to civil society organisations (CSOs) and the private sector.

These eight issue areas are:

- Women, Peace and Security (WPS)
- Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)
- Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)
- Women’s Participation and Influence in Decision Making
- Education
- Women’s Economic Equality (WEE)
- Unpaid Care
- Social Norms

The BPfA included concrete commitments under 12 critical areas of concern (see box below). The issues covered in Part two of this report include areas of concern identified by the BPfA together with new emerging issues. Other areas, such as the environment and media, are also critical for gender equality and the advancement of women’s and girls’ rights but are not our areas of expertise.

## BPfA Critical Areas of Concern

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Women and the environment</li><li>• Women in power and decision making</li><li>• The girl child</li><li>• Women and the economy</li><li>• Women and poverty</li><li>• Violence against women</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Human rights of women</li><li>• Education and training of women</li><li>• Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women</li><li>• Women and health</li><li>• Women and the media</li><li>• Women and armed conflict</li></ul> |
|--|---|

While spotlighting specific issues, it is also important to underline the interconnectedness of gender inequality and recognise the underlying causes that impact across issue areas and span political, social, economic, cultural and environmental spheres. The recommendations throughout the report are therefore inter-linked and mutually reinforcing. While the actions are intended to be relevant for all women and girls, specific attention must be given those who are the most marginalised, and who face multiple discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, disability and marital status.

In addition, as the post-2015 agenda is agreed and implemented, we have developed recommendations, which should inform international and national action on gender equality and women's and girls' rights (see box below).<sup>43</sup>

## Post-2015 framework Recommendations

The post-2015 framework must include all the elements needed to achieve gender equality and women's rights:

1. The framework should include a standalone goal on achieving gender equality and women's rights.
2. Under this goal, or specifically and adequately addressed under other goals, the framework should include the following transformative targets:
  - Eliminate all forms of VAWG, including sexual violence, everywhere
  - Ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation and influence in decision making at all levels of household, public and political life
  - Recognise, reduce, redistribute and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility between women and men within the household and the family
  - Ensure women's equal access to full and productive employment and decent work, and equal pay for work of equal value to address the barriers that women face such as occupational segregation by gender
  - Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights
3. The final framework must effectively mainstream gender equality so that targets under all goals recognise the specific, gender-related barriers that women and girls face.
4. Transformative indicators should be selected under the gender goal and throughout the framework which reflect the need to tackle structural barriers of gender inequality.
5. The framework should include an ambitious agreement on financing for development and the means of implementation which recognises the need to increase funding towards achieving gender equality and the gender aspects of all development finance.

Finally, we want to acknowledge the wealth of information and understanding that already exists, particularly in the Global South, which must inform the priorities and work of international institutions, governments and International NGOs (INGOs) to make gender equality and the human rights of women and girls a priority.

## 1. Women, Peace and Security (WPS)

*“Peace starts from the closest place to us - our home, then it takes us further - to our community, then our society, country and world. Men are included in peacebuilding at all of these levels, women are not. Peace, conflict and violence has an impact on us all - women and men - but only men are recognised and included. Only men are asked how conflict affects them and how peace can be built. But we women have the experience and education to tell the world that too. It is our right to be included in peacebuilding so that our homes, communities, societies and countries are free from violence.”*

Hasina Safi, Director, Afghan Women’s Network<sup>44</sup>

### 1.1 The Issues

Historically, conflict and peace have been seen as a male-dominated arena with men fighting the battles as well as negotiating and signing the peace deals. Women have typically been viewed as victims in conflict or as having a role to ‘serve’ combatants, such as the estimated 200,000 ‘comfort women’ who were forced into sexual slavery for Japanese soldiers during World War II.<sup>45</sup> The voices and experiences of women and girls in conflict, peace and security have largely been silenced in both historical records and political discourse. Yet women and girls experience conflict, post-conflict contexts and peacebuilding in ways unique to their gender. Women play varied roles including as combatants, survivors, witnesses, peacekeepers, service providers and change makers. The inclusion of women and girls, and recognition of their experiences, is essential to sustainable peace and ending the cycle of violence.

The policy framework on **Women, Peace and Security** extends from the international to the local level, from intergovernmental bodies such as the United Nations to local women’s movements. In response to persistent advocacy from civil society the UN Security Council has so far, adopted seven resolutions on WPS. The seven resolutions should be taken together under a single umbrella, as they comprise the WPS international policy framework. They guide work to promote and protect the rights of women in conflict and post-conflict situations. As binding Security Council resolutions, they should be implemented by all member states and relevant actors, including UN system entities and parties to conflict.<sup>46</sup>

Women and girls face a range of experiences in conflict-affected contexts, from political marginalisation to economic hardships, and security issues such as human rights abuses and violence. Women also make up the majority of adult displaced populations. For example, one in four households of Syrian refugee families in Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan are headed by women<sup>47</sup> and, in Mali, more than 50 percent of displaced families are headed by women.<sup>48</sup> The destruction of support services and infrastructure during conflict has a significant impact on women, particularly displaced women, intensifying the burden of caring responsibilities, limiting freedom of movement and increasing insecurity and the risk of Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG).

VAWG, including rape, forced impregnation, forced abortion, sexual trafficking, the spread of sexually transmitted infections such as HIV and AIDS, and an increase in Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), is one of the defining characteristics of modern warfare. Conservative estimates suggest that 20,000 to 50,000 women were raped during the 1992–1995 war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and approximately 250,000 to 500,000 women and girls were raped in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.<sup>49</sup> International peace operations have also been shown, at times, to contribute to local women’s insecurity, with increases in sexual violence and exploitation, as well as their security.<sup>50</sup> Unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, stigmatisation and physical and mental trauma ensure that the consequences of sexual violence continue long after conflict.

Despite the specific impact of conflict on women and international commitments in this area, peace negotiations largely remain the domain of men, and peace agreements repeatedly fail to reflect the priorities of women and girls.<sup>51</sup> Women continue to be under-represented in post-conflict decision making, governance and security and justice mechanisms, and post-conflict recovery processes often fail to take into account the different needs of women, girls, men and boys.<sup>52</sup> Local and international efforts to reform the security sector including the police, judiciary and military, frequently do not consult with women and girls or respond to their needs. Female combatants and women and girls who live in communities combatants return to after conflict, are also largely forgotten within disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes and in the design, implementation and monitoring of humanitarian response and recovery programmes.

### What does the BPfA Say?

- Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision making levels and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflict or under foreign occupation.
- Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments.
- Promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations.
- Promote women’s contribution to fostering a culture of peace.
- Provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women.<sup>53</sup>

## 1.2 What's happened in the last 20 years?

### Increasing international and national commitments

Issues relating to WPS have received greater attention since the BPfA and have been pushed continuously by women and civil society. Women in conflict-affected countries were instrumental in the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on WPS and have mobilised on a global scale to demand inclusion in peace and security-related decision making, often in the face of profound threats to their safety.<sup>54</sup>

This continued activism and subsequent increased global attention have resulted in seven Security Council Resolutions (see box below) as well as an increase in the number of countries which have developed National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS. The UK has now published its third NAP (2014 – 2017) and globally, as of November 2014, there are 46 NAPs.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, all Security Council resolutions should now include details on WPS and the Secretary General makes annual WPS reports to the Security Council. The commitments for states and multilateral institutions outlined in these resolutions and NAPs have been useful, and evidence a growing consensus on WPS and its importance. For example, the last two Security Council resolutions, 2106 and 2122 (2013), were adopted unanimously by an otherwise divided Security Council. UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) General Recommendation no. 30 adopted in 2013 includes many elements of the WPS resolutions which states must commit to and report against under CEDAW.<sup>56</sup> Some pillars of WPS, particularly in relation to the prevention of, and protection from VAWG have received widespread international attention in recent years such as the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence (GBV) in Emergencies and the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict which was hosted by the then UK Foreign Secretary in 2014 in London.

#### The pillars of Security Council Resolution 1325 on WPS<sup>57</sup>

- **Prevention:** Prevention of conflict and all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations
- **Participation:** Women participate equally with men and gender equality is promoted in peace and security decision making processes at local, national, regional and international levels
- **Protection:** Women's and girls' rights are protected and promoted in conflict-affected situations
- **Relief and Recovery:** Women's and girls' specific relief needs are met and women's capacities to act as agents in relief and recovery are reinforced in conflict and post-conflict situations

### **Growing evidence base**

More research and evidence is being generated, including for DFID's new 'What Works' for VAWG programming.<sup>58</sup> UNHCR and donors' increased focus on prevention and protection, particularly at Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, has seen the development of tools and best practice in this area. In recent years, there has also been more discussion of the importance of WPS in terms of national security,<sup>59</sup> which, despite its limitations (see *challenges and ways forward* below) has been a useful tool to establish that women's rights must be integrated into work on peace and stability, including defence policies.

### **International Frameworks on WPS**

There have been seven UN Security Council resolutions relating to WPS, starting with UNSCR 1325 in 2000 which framed women's rights in conflict as a security issue. A number of additional resolutions have been adopted: 1820 (2008), and 1888 (2009) and 1960 (2010) focus on preventing and responding to sexual violence as a tactic of war, while 1889 (2009) calls for global indicators to monitor implementation of UNSCR 1325 and for greater attention to the gender dimensions of post-conflict planning and financing. The most recent Security Council resolutions, 2106 and 2122, focussing on sexual violence and participation respectively, were adopted in 2013. In 2013, the CEDAW Committee also issued General Recommendation no. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations. In 2013, the G8 made a Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict was launched during the 68th session of the UN General Assembly in 2013 and endorsed by 155 countries.

In addition, there has been a range of regional developments, such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and an increase in NAPs on WPS. The Secretary General's Seven Point Plan (2010) on women's participation in peacebuilding provides practical steps for the implementation of the UNSCRs.<sup>60</sup>

### **Slow and uneven implementation of commitments into action**

Whilst progress has been made, particularly in international policy, there has been limited implementation of commitments. This includes a lack of action to address the root causes of gender inequality and limited progress on women and, where appropriate, girls' participation, including within peace and security institutions and negotiations in the UK, EU and NATO. Implementation has been slow and uneven, particularly in relation to women's participation in preventing, resolving and recovering from conflict. A review of 33 peace negotiations found that only four percent of participants - 11 out of 280 - were women.<sup>61</sup> Of nine peace agreements in 2011, only those in Somalia and Yemen included particular provisions for women.<sup>62</sup> In conflict-affected countries, women's share of seats in parliament is four points below the global average of 22 percent and women occupy only 13 percent of ministerial positions.<sup>63</sup> 97

percent of military peacekeepers and 90 percent of police personnel are men.<sup>64</sup> Female voters are four times as likely as men to be targeted for intimidation in elections in fragile and transitional states.<sup>65</sup> Out of approximately 300 peace agreements between 1989 and 2008, only 18 made mention of sexual gender-based violence (GBV), and even fewer set out concrete steps to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable, or offered redress to the survivors.<sup>66</sup> In programming, the response often does not match the reality for women and girls on the ground. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, despite reports of the extent of VAWG, 54 percent of projects do not integrate gender analysis into their planning or implementation.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the important commitments to demilitarisation and disarmament contained in the BPfA have been almost dropped from the WPS agenda by most governments. As a result, despite increased commitments, action and change on the ground has been limited and women are still marginalised.

### **Women as agents of change not victims**

Where there has been action in response to UNSCR 1325 this has primarily focussed on women and girls as passive victims of violence to be protected rather than as active agents in the peacebuilding process. For example, UNSCR 1960<sup>68</sup> focuses on women as victims of sexual violence and fails to acknowledge the importance of women's participation in all levels of decision making to reduce sexual violence during conflict and build peace.<sup>69</sup> Despite the comprehensive nature of the UNSCRs, BPfA and related frameworks, states are far more willing to make policy commitments to combat sexual violence than they are to take action on women's participation in peace negotiations and emerging governments and economies, consult with women and girls, or to challenge entrenched gender inequalities. International institutions have also made poor progress in modelling the inclusion of female peace-builders. There has never been a female Secretary General of the United Nations, and only one chief mediator appointed to UN-sponsored peace talks has been a woman.<sup>70</sup>

### **1.3 Challenges and ways forward**

In recent years, there has been a move to demonstrate the importance of WPS in terms of national security on the basis that inclusive, more equal societies lead to more stable secure countries, which in turn is important for global security. Whilst this argument has been helpful to engage actors who think of WPS as a 'soft' security issue outside the realms of 'hard' security, it has meant that WPS is framed in terms of international security and stability rather than as an issue of fundamental rights to participate and to live free from violence. There are a number of areas which present key challenges for WPS and which require action to tackle the underlying structures which are crucial to building and enhancing women's and where appropriate girls' participation in building sustainable and inclusive peace.

## Prioritising women's meaningful participation

The participation of women and, where appropriate, adolescent girls, in conflict prevention, humanitarian response to conflict, peace negotiations and post-conflict recovery processes is a fundamental human right. The meaningful participation of women also helps ensure that their particular experiences of conflict are considered and that their experiences, priorities and skills contribute to sustainable peace.<sup>71</sup> Women's and girls' experiences of conflict and the aftermath of conflict frequently differ from those of men and boys and their requirements for peace need to be identified, prioritised and funded.

The importance of participation across the pillars of UNSCR 1325 is key to governments achieving their WPS commitments, including women's role in the prevention of conflict and violence, participation in conflict resolution and in the design and implementation of relief and recovery activities. This includes women's political, social and economic participation at community, local, national and international levels and extensive consultation to identify women's and girls' needs.<sup>72</sup> There is a danger that the focus on addressing sexual violence in conflict (SVC) has side-lined other pillars of UNSCR 1325 (see box on the Security Council Resolution 1325).

In the past five years, there has been an increased acknowledgement of the importance of women's economic empowerment during and after conflict. However, this work is often aimed at income generation rather than empowerment, and is also based on assumptions that economic empowerment will lead to effective participation more broadly (see Part two: Section 6 on WEE). Similarly, the focus on political empowerment has been on getting women into high level political power after conflict, without empowering them when they get there and assuming that high level political power will lead to women's empowerment nationally. There is also a tendency to treat women and girls as a homogenous group, without accounting for age, social class, caste, urban/rural location, ethnicity, disability and marginalised groups including widows and sexual and gender minorities.

**Women's meaningful participation must be prioritised in the design, development and delivery of donor funding and commitments. It is essential that women are able to fully participate in social, economic and political life at all levels and that their participation is supported. Whilst women's political participation requires a multilevel, comprehensive approach which addresses women's decision making power at all levels, a 30 percent target as a minimum (as mandated by the United Nations Economic and Social Council) would help to enable women to reach the critical mass required to impact decision making (see Part two: Section 4 on Political Participation).**

## Addressing the root causes of VAWG

Sexual violence in conflict is part of a wider continuum of VAWG, which women and girls experience outside of conflict. Women and girls also experience different forms and consequences of violence that are specific to their gender such as forced pregnancies, intimate partner violence or forced sterilisation. To prevent VAWG, the root causes and social norms attached to those must be addressed (see Part two: Section 2 on VAWG and Part two: Section 8 on Social Norms). The Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI), a UK-driven programme, which led to a global Summit in 2014, was broadly welcomed by NGOs and governments. However, it has a specific focus on sexual violence committed by combatants and only addresses impunity. Such approaches are often instead of a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes and the importance of women's participation in conflict prevention. A focus on combatant-perpetrated sexual violence also overlooks the rise of civilian-perpetrated and intimate partner violence, and other forms of VAWG during and after conflict. For example, in the Syrian conflict, women are reporting an increased incidence of intimate partner violence as well as early and forced marriage and sexual harassment.<sup>73</sup>

Tackling VAWG in conflict requires broad prevention approaches which address all forms of VAWG. The Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies, launched by the UK government and currently chaired by the US government, looks at preventing all forms of VAWG in emergencies, including, but not limited to, sexual violence in conflict.

Increased attention to issues such as sexual violence has also correlated with a framing of women and girls as victims in conflict. This approach overlooks women's and girls' agency and empowerment<sup>74</sup> and has resulted in responses which focus on protection rather than prevention of VAWG with the prioritisation of security and justice sector reforms (see Part two: Section 2 on VAWG). Furthermore, despite the 'prevention' pillar of UNSCR 1325 including prevention of conflict, prevention is often interpreted as referring only to prevention of VAWG, whilst disregarding the prevention of conflict itself.

**WPS policies and programmes need to comprehensively address the root causes of VAWG, meet commitments on women's exclusion from economic, social and political participation and empowerment and wider gender inequality during and after conflict.**

## Developing a holistic approach to WPS

The four pillars of WPS, although intended to be seen as mutually reinforcing and overlapping, are often treated in isolation from each other. For example, there is a

tendency to focus on ‘prevention’ in silo from ‘protection’ or ‘participation’ efforts, if they exist. There has also been a lack of cross-government coordination. It is important that Foreign, Development, Defence, Home Affairs, Gender and other related ministries coordinate and all take an active role in implementing WPS commitments and do so across the WPS pillars. There is also a shortage of dedicated funding to WPS and mechanisms for tracking funding allocations, which would be key to supporting efforts to comprehensively address WPS.<sup>75</sup> Integration of WPS commitments into military and defence policy and practice has been limited. NATO have produced a strong Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, but despite UK and NATO commitments, at the UK-hosted NATO Summit in 2014 women from conflict-affected countries were excluded and UNSCR 1325 was not included on the agenda.<sup>76</sup>

**Governments must take a coordinated approach to WPS, addressing all of the WPS pillars, and should commit financial resources to achieve WPS commitments. These financial resources should be tracked using internationally recognised reporting mechanisms such as the OECD Gender Marker. This would support governments to assess how much of their conflict and peacebuilding funding is being spent on WPS.**

### Supporting women’s rights organisations

Women’s rights organisations and movements play an important role in conflict-affected states in supporting women affected by conflict, promoting women’s role in peacebuilding, securing access to justice and preventing conflict.<sup>77</sup> They also play a crucial accountability role, monitoring their government’s action and holding governments to account on their commitments to women.<sup>78</sup> Research carried out by Womankind Worldwide and ActionAid in five fragile and conflict-affected countries also shows that women’s rights organisations at the grassroots level play a vital role in mitigating conflict and building peace.<sup>79</sup>

Women human rights defenders and women’s rights organisations working for peace often face a range of threats to their safety. At the personal and community levels, women who speak out and work across the lines of conflict may face pressure, ostracisation or may be targeted by state and non-state actors.<sup>80</sup> Importantly, UNSCR 2106 and the new UK NAP on UNSCR 1325 commit to increasing support to women’s rights organisations and networks.

**The role of local women’s rights organisations should be acknowledged throughout conflict policy as key in peacebuilding and impact monitoring. This should include donor funding in line with UNSCR 2106 commitments. Donor funding should integrate security and protection measures for women human rights defenders.**

## 1.4 Recommendations

International institutions/governments should:

1. Fully implement defence, diplomatic and development commitments in the BPfA and WPS-related UNSCRs with action and funding on the ground.
2. Take targeted, comprehensive action on women's, and where appropriate adolescent girls', participation in decision making across political, social, humanitarian and economic spheres from the community through to the international level.
3. Work with, systematically consult, and provide funding to women's rights organisations to support their role at the forefront of service provision and promotion of WPS.
4. Provide dedicated funding to WPS and track this funding allocation using internationally recognised reporting mechanisms such as the OECD Gender Marker.
5. Address the root causes of and social norms attached to VAWG, women's and girls' exclusion from economic, social and political participation and wider gender inequality, both during and after conflict.
6. Reprioritise conflict prevention as part of the 'prevention' pillar, including through demilitarisation, disarmament and fostering cultures of peace as set out in the Beijing Platform for Action.

## 2. Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)

*“Though many efforts have been made by both state and non-state agencies to eliminate violence against women, it still remains the dark side of society's life. Violence against women and girls is assuming alarming proportions across the world. It is occurring during times of conflict and during periods of peace. Violence continues to manifest itself in harmful cultural practices, abuse during pregnancy, spousal murder, psychological violence and physical violence among others. Violence is perpetrated by and against people of all social backgrounds.”*

Patricia Isabella Essel, WiLDAF Ghana<sup>81</sup>

### 2.1 The Issues

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) across the world is one of the most pervasive violations of human rights. Women and girls are subjected to different forms of violence just because they are female, including physical, sexual, psychological and economic forms of violence, both within and outside of the home. Violence cuts across every country, culture, socio-economic group, religion and age group - with 35 percent of women around the world experiencing violence in their lifetime and 30 percent experiencing intimate partner violence.<sup>82</sup> VAWG is both a manifestation and driver of

gender inequality, affecting and affected by social constructs of what it is to be female and how women and girls are to be treated or valued. In addition, gender discrimination intersects with other forms of discrimination to make some women and girls more vulnerable to violence, including women and girls with disabilities, elderly women, lesbian and transgender women, and indigenous women. Multiple and intersecting discrimination also presents additional barriers to accessing services.<sup>83</sup>

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defines **violence against women** as:  
 “Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private.”<sup>84</sup>

VAWG is situated within a much wider discriminatory system of unequal power relations between women and men which impacts on women’s ability to control their own lives and undermines women’s potential to affect change in the world.<sup>85</sup> It is an intentional and systematic mechanism of social control which reinforces the subordinate status of women and girls and impedes women’s ability to enjoy rights and freedoms equally to men. Social change that redresses power imbalances and structural inequality between women and men is therefore vital for reducing and ultimately eliminating VAWG.<sup>86</sup>

The impact of violence constricts women’s and girls’ economic, social and political empowerment and severely limits freedom of movement and autonomy in decision making. In turn, these power imbalances underpin and give rise to VAWG. Women are also frequently blamed for the violence committed against them; survivors of sexual violence, rather than their attacker, often bear the stigma and other consequences of the crime. In this way, VAWG and the threat of such violence inhibits the rights of women and girls to live their lives with dignity, respect and freedom from fear.<sup>87</sup>

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|---|---|
| <p><b>What does the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) Say?</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take integrated measures to prevent and eliminate VAWG.</li> <li>• Study the causes and consequences of VAWG and the effectiveness of preventative measures.</li> <li>• Eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking.<sup>88</sup></li> </ul> |
|---|---|

## 2.2 What’s happened in the last 20 years?

### Increased recognition

One of the crucial achievements of women’s rights activists has been to successfully advocate for VAWG to be recognised as a human rights violation, changing

perceptions of VAWG from a purely private matter to one which requires public attention and action by governments and public authorities. This is reflected in the introduction of the standard of due diligence, enshrined in international frameworks such as CEDAW Committee General Recommendation 19 and the BPfA, which situate the responsibility of preventing and responding to VAWG firmly with states.

There has been an increased global commitment to addressing VAWG in different settings and improved international coordination through campaigns such as the United Nations *UNiTE to End Violence against Women* and events such as the Call to Action to protect women and girls in emergencies (2013), the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict (2014), the Girl Summit (2014) and the 57<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) (2013) which considered “*The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls*”<sup>89</sup> as its priority theme.

Important international frameworks (see box below) have also been introduced such as the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence which entered into force in 2014. In the countdown to the new post-2015 framework, the failure to address VAWG has also been widely acknowledged as a gap in the current Millennium Development Goals (MDG) framework.<sup>90</sup>

### International Frameworks on VAWG

UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee General Recommendations 12 and 19 clarified that CEDAW includes VAWG and made detailed recommendations including requiring states to prevent VAWG and to provide comprehensive services to survivors of violence. The Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment 13 calls on governments to address all forms of gender discrimination, including addressing gender-based stereotypes and power imbalances as part of a violence prevention strategy (para 72(b)).

Other important frameworks include the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará) (1995), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (2004) and the recent Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). Additionally, Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Council Resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1960 (2010) focus on preventing and responding to sexual violence as a tactic of war (see Part two: Section 1 on WPS).

### **Emerging evidence base**

Recent years have also seen the emergence of an evidence and practice base which makes the prevention of VAWG a measurable and tangible goal.<sup>91</sup> Research methods have been developed to enable sensitive and ethically-focussed data collection on VAWG and in many countries representative sample surveys have now been carried out on VAWG. The methods used by the WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence have gained acceptance<sup>92</sup> and research guidelines and ethical standards on collecting data on VAWG have been developed.<sup>93</sup> Work on the development of indicators has also been undertaken by the UN.<sup>94</sup> In 1994, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women was appointed to seek and receive information on VAWG and its causes and consequences.

### **Gaps remain between commitments and implementation**

However, while growing international attention has led to an increased focus on advocacy, research and campaigning on VAWG, a gap remains between policy commitments and implementation. No state in the world is currently fulfilling its obligations to prevent and respond to VAWG.<sup>95</sup> According to the World Bank, just over half of 143 states (53 percent) have domestic laws to protect women from violence.<sup>96</sup> Of these laws not all protect unmarried women in intimate relationships and only three-quarters have a specialised court or procedure for cases. Moreover, women's rights remain a highly politicised issue with 'traditional' or 'conservative' discriminatory social norms continuing to present significant challenges to progress (see Part two: Section 8 on Social Norms).

Even when international standards are reflected in domestic laws, there is a general lack of effective implementation as a result of inadequate resources and service provision, low levels of public awareness, ineffective enforcement within the security and justice sectors and a failure to take a multi-sector approach to ending violence. VAWG continues to be viewed as a private matter, which affects responses in the prevention, reporting and prosecution of violence. Contradictions between domestic legislation and religious or customary laws, such as the family code in the Democratic Republic of Congo<sup>97</sup> or 'moral crimes' in Afghanistan<sup>98</sup>, also act as a barrier to effective implementation. Furthermore, funding for VAWG programming is frequently not reaching women's rights organisations, nor is sufficient long-term funding available to support transformative programme work such as programmes to challenge the social norms that underpin and condone VAWG.

In humanitarian settings; donors, multilaterals and NGOs continue to struggle to prioritise VAWG as a life-saving intervention in emergency response. GBV prevention is frequently not mainstreamed in humanitarian sectors such as health, water and sanitation, and shelter, and important frameworks such as the *Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings* have not been consistently implemented.<sup>99</sup> Specialised VAWG programmes are also not receiving the priority or resources needed to meet the scale of the needs

in humanitarian emergencies today. For example, not a single VAWG programme has been funded in two rounds of the Common Humanitarian Fund for the Central African Republic.<sup>100</sup>

### **Continued violation of women's and girls' rights**

The reported incidence of VAWG remains devastatingly high, and is likely to be only a small percentage of the actual violence inflicted on women. Further, all women are affected by the *possibility* of violence and threats to their emotional and physical well-being. According to a 2013 global review of available evidence, 30 percent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence.<sup>101</sup> It is estimated that almost half of all women killed in 2012 were killed by intimate partners or family members.<sup>102</sup> Over 125 million girls and women have been subjected to FGM and an additional 30 million girls are at risk over the next 10 years.<sup>103</sup> Women and girls also represent 98 percent of the estimated 4.5 million people worldwide forced into sexual exploitation.<sup>104</sup> Meanwhile, cases of VAWG continue to go unreported. For instance, interviews with 42,000 women across the European Union revealed that only 14 percent of women reported their most serious incident of intimate partner violence to the police.<sup>105</sup> The continuing sheer scale of VAWG illustrates the extent to which it is normalised due to social acceptance and impunity as well as the scale of resources and political commitment necessary to meet the needs of female survivors of violence.

## **2.3 Challenges and ways forward**

In recent years, a number of key trends are emerging in the debate surrounding VAWG, and new challenges are compounded by the persistence of social norms, which condone and perpetuate VAWG.

### **The root causes of VAWG**

One of the key challenges is the failure to address institutional practices and broader social norms that reinforce and condone VAWG. There is a growing evidence base that demonstrates that social norms related to male authority, acceptance of wife beating and female subordination affect the overall level of VAWG in different settings.<sup>106</sup> For example, a recent study across South Asia, South-East Asia, East Asia and the Pacific found that the most common motivation that men reported for perpetrating both partner and non-partner rape was men's belief that they have the right to sex, regardless of consent (see Part two: Section 8 on Social Norms).<sup>107</sup>

However, interventions addressing VAWG still tend to prioritise responsive measures such as building the institutional capacity of formal security and justice sectors (such as the police and the court system) rather than addressing the drivers of violence, including discriminatory social norms and wider gender inequality. Although a focus on investigations and prosecutions as a response to violence<sup>108</sup> is important and may act as a deterrent, it needs to be combined with transformative interventions which target

the discriminatory social norms which condone and perpetuate violence and the empowerment of women and girls.

Significantly, investing in women's rights organisations can impact VAWG at multiple levels due to their focus on women-led solutions that are firmly rooted in local communities, conditions, contexts and needs, including the needs of marginalised women.<sup>109</sup> Research in 70 countries across four decades found that the mobilisation of women's rights organisations and movements is more important for tackling VAWG than a nation's income, left-wing political parties, or the representation of women in politics.<sup>110</sup>

**It is critical that responses to VAWG address the power imbalances and structural inequality between women and men by adopting approaches which empower women and girls and challenge social norms which reinforce and condone VAWG, and by supporting women's rights organisations and movements including with adequate resources.**

### Addressing all forms of VAWG

Certain forms of VAWG, such as FGM, early and forced marriage and sexual violence in conflict, have been receiving increased attention. While this is welcome, a failure to acknowledge other forms of violence, such as psychological and economic violence, obscures the interconnected nature of VAWG and the continuum of violence that women and girls face throughout their lifetimes. Furthermore, specific forms of VAWG have often been narrowly defined. For example, sexual violence in conflict has tended to be recognised as combatant-perpetrated sexual violence whereas evidence suggests that conflict also increases levels of civilian-perpetrated sexual violence (see Part two: Section 1 on WPS).<sup>111</sup> In addition, there is frequently a failure to recognise the interconnectedness between VAWG and other violations of women's and girls' rights such as access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), education, economic empowerment and women's and girls' participation.

**VAWG should be recognised as a continuum that affects women and girls in different ways throughout their lives. Further research is needed into economic and psychological forms of violence as well as the linkages between VAWG and access to SRHR, education, economic empowerment and women's and girls' participation.**

### Survivor-centred and multi-sectoral approach

Survivors of all forms of VAWG should have access to comprehensive and appropriate services including health, case management, legal and psycho-social support, livelihoods support, and protection from further violence and reprisals. Recently, there have been moves towards an approach to VAWG programming which attempts to

place all forms of violence into a 'gender neutral' framework. Such approaches threaten female survivors' access to specialist women-only support services.<sup>112</sup> The Special Rapporteur on VAWG has stated that *"where possible, services should be run by independent and experienced women's non-governmental organizations providing gender-specific, empowering and comprehensive support to women survivors of violence, based on feminist principles."*<sup>113</sup>

States should support coordination and collaboration among sectors at national and local levels and ensure adequate resourcing to implement a multi-sectoral approach. Interventions should be survivor-centred and should be driven by women's and girls' own experiences and input within all initiatives and strategies to ensure that these are empowering. Women and girls should not be patronised as victims but respected, listened to and supported to make their own decisions. Survivor groups should also be included in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes intended to address VAWG.

**Women should have access to a diverse range of support, across all forms of violence, which is women-only, survivor-centred and responsive to the different needs of women. It is vital that survivors' autonomy is respected and they are listened to and consulted throughout the development and implementation of policies, laws and programmes.**

### Including all groups of women

Women and girls experience violence in different ways at different points in their lifetimes. However, the debate has largely overlooked multiple discriminations, including with regard to older women. For example, many studies fail to collect data on women over the age of 49 (DHS<sup>114</sup>, WHO<sup>115</sup>, UNAIDS<sup>116</sup>) and the focus on sexual and physical violence tends to exclude the forms of VAWG that older women face, including neglect and psychological abuse.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, disabled women and girls are largely invisible in current VAWG analysis and programmes, despite evidence that disabled women and girls are twice as likely to experience violence as non-disabled women and girls, and face greater obstacles in reporting violence and accessing support, justice and rehabilitation services.<sup>118</sup>

**Measures must be incorporated into policy, programming and legislation which recognise the different ways in which gender inequality intersects with other inequalities to further increase the vulnerability of particular groups of women to violence and the barriers faced by these women and girls in accessing appropriate services.**

## The role of men and boys

There has been increasing attention to working with men and boys as a primary approach to addressing VAWG. For example, in 2009, MenEngage hosted the first Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Equality, culminating in the Rio Declaration – a call to action for men and boys including on GBV.<sup>119</sup> While much of this work is useful, it should not be seen as a standalone component; at times this focus on men's and boys' engagement in tackling VAWG has risked obscuring the comprehensive multi-level approach needed to end VAWG as well as the importance of working with women's rights organisations and prioritising women's empowerment. This new focus on men and boys can also be problematic where it has seen a move away from men as allies and targets to leaders in GBV initiatives, which risks failing to challenge existing patriarchal structures that already keep women and girls silent in debates around violations of their rights.<sup>120</sup>

**Engaging men and boys is important as part of broad, multi-level approaches which prioritise the empowerment of women and girls. Programmes working with men and boys should work in a way that does not reassert male power over women, that keeps women and girls at the centre, and that focuses on transforming gender inequality.**

## Faith organisations

Faith organisations and faith leaders can have a strong impact, both positive and negative, on how VAWG is perceived within local communities. While working with faith leaders has typically been overlooked in responses to preventing VAWG, civil society organisations are increasingly including and training faith leaders on addressing VAWG and non-faith staff on how to include people of faith effectively to end violence.<sup>121</sup>

This is particularly important in the current global context of the rise of religious fundamentalisms. Research by AWID has found that women's rights activists frequently mention an increase in VAWG as a negative impact of the rise of religious fundamentalisms.<sup>122</sup> Armed extremist groups, such as Boko Haram, ISIS or the Taliban, have consistently targeted women and girls as part of oppressive and terrorist tactics, which include trafficking, forced conversions, and targeting female students. In other contexts, religious fundamentalists campaign against provisions that might reduce VAWG or promote legal or structural inequalities that compromise women's choices as well as their safety, such as the protests outside abortion centres in the USA.

**Donors should recognise the value of working with faith leaders to address VAWG and support this work across faiths. Such work should be carefully monitored to mitigate any negative impacts. Efforts to end VAWG should also**

**address the rise in fundamentalisms, in particular, by enabling the voices of women operating in these contexts to be heard.**

## **2.4 Recommendations**

International institutions/governments should:

1. Prioritise and invest in preventing VAWG, including empowering women and girls, working with men and boys, challenging discriminatory social norms and working with local leaders including faith leaders.
2. Ensure resources and political will address all forms of VAWG and respond to multiple and intersecting discrimination.
3. Strengthen multi-sector (health, education, justice) and survivor-centred responses to violence; and ensure survivors have access to comprehensive and appropriate services.
4. Recognise and support the role of national and grassroots women's rights organisations in preventing and responding to violence, including by increasing financial support to women's rights organisations.
5. Integrate and prioritise violence against women and girls programming into all humanitarian and conflict responses, including prevention.

## **3. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)**

*"We need to understand that one of the priorities in family planning programmes should be access without shame or guilt. This is missing from most programmes. In general, there are very high levels of stigma and discrimination in health services such as family planning. And the needs of HIV-positive people are not addressed. There has been a narrow, myopic view of providing services, but this needs to be widened: we need to see it through a justice lens."*

Sarita Barpanda, Civil Society Representative, India<sup>123</sup>

### **3.1 The Issues**

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are a critical part of women's rights. The ability of all women, including young women and adolescent girls, to exercise their reproductive rights to make free and informed choices about their fertility, and about whether and when to have children is a central component of gender equality. Access to contraception, based on informed choice, empowers women and girls to decide when to have children and can transform their position in the household, community, school, the labour force, political sphere and wider society.<sup>124</sup> Sexual rights, including the ability to control all aspects of one's sexuality, free of discrimination, coercion, or violence, are also a vital component of women's rights. Both reproductive and sexual rights, in turn, impact on women's and girls' health and safety and can increase opportunities to access education, political participation and employment.

Poor access to sexual and reproductive health has a major impact on women’s lives. Pregnancy, unsafe abortion and childbirth remain the leading causes of death and disability among women of reproductive age in developing countries today.<sup>125</sup> Almost 800 women die every day in pregnancy and childbirth, largely from preventable causes.<sup>126</sup> Women in low-income countries are particularly affected. For example, the maternal mortality ratio in developing countries is 15 times higher than in developed countries.<sup>127</sup>

**Universal access to sexual and reproductive health services** comprises a full range of integrated services including ‘family planning counselling, information, and education and a full range of contraceptive services; education and services for pre-natal care, safe delivery, and post-natal care; prevention and treatment of infertility; safe abortion services and post-abortion care; treatment of reproductive tract infections, sexually transmitted infections, and other reproductive health conditions; prevention and treatment of breast cancer, cervical cancer, and other cancers of the reproductive system; and comprehensive sexuality education, among other things, that are delivered through the primary health care system in a way that respects human rights, including the right to bodily integrity and informed consent.’<sup>128</sup>

Many women lack the power to negotiate whether, with whom and under what circumstances they have sex. Data from 33 developing countries reveals that almost one third of women cannot refuse sex with their partners and more than 41 percent across those 33 countries say they could not ask their partner to use a condom.<sup>129</sup> Women’s choices about their bodies are further limited by violence, stigma and discrimination when seeking services, and a lack of access to safe and effective modern methods of contraception as well as to information about sexual and reproductive health services.

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|---|--|
| <p><b>What does the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) Say?</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognises the right of women to have control over matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.<sup>130</sup></li> <li>• States should undertake gender-sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health issues.<sup>131</sup></li> </ul> |
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### 3.2 What’s happened in the last 20 years?

#### Greater recognition at international and national levels

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994 recognised the interrelationships between human sexuality and gender relations. It also recognised the impact of gender-based sexual violence, and efforts to control

women's sexuality. Over the past two decades, this has been followed by an increasing understanding of women's SRHR as a central pillar in achieving human rights, reducing poverty and attaining gender equality. This has been reflected in commitments at the global level, such as at events including ICPD+5, ICPD+10 and the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS in 2006.<sup>132</sup> In October 2007, the target of universal access to reproductive health was added to Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 5, for improving maternal health. Various other international frameworks have also recognised the importance of SRHR (see box below).

After the ICPD, many countries enacted national laws and policies on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and introduced specific programmes within their health-care systems. According to a 2004 UNFPA survey on progress, about 86 percent of countries had adopted policy measures, laws or institutional changes at national levels to promote or enforce reproductive rights.<sup>133</sup> More recently, there has been welcome interest by organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and global partnerships such as Family Planning 2020, in promoting and supporting a rights-based approach to family planning. However there continues to be fierce opposition from some countries to the inclusion of rights language, particularly sexual rights, in international agreements and conventions, such as in the post-2015 framework.

### International Frameworks on SRHR

The Cairo Programme of Action sets out the concept of reproductive rights in Chapter 7, including freedom to make decisions regarding the number, spacing and timing of children, the right to attain the highest standard of reproductive and sexual health and the right of all to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion, and violence. CEDAW specifies the right to information and advice on family planning (Article 10(h)), access to healthcare including family planning (Article 12.1)), prenatal and postnatal healthcare (Article 12.2), reproductive choice and calls for a minimum age for marriage.

MDGs 4 and 5 focus on the less contentious areas of reproductive health, specifically in relation to maternal health and family planning.

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003) articulated a woman's right to abortion when pregnancy results from sexual assault, rape or incest; or when continuation of the pregnancy endangers the life or health of the pregnant woman. It also explicitly called for the legal prohibition of harmful practices such as FGM. UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee General Recommendation no. 30 on Women in Conflict Prevention, Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations explicitly indicates that states should provide safe abortion services as a component of their obligation to provide sexual and reproductive healthcare.

There are various other international commitments in relation to FGM and child, early and forced marriage including a UN General Assembly Resolution on Child, Early & Forced Marriage adopted in November 2014<sup>134</sup> and a United Nations General Assembly Resolution condemning FGM adopted in December 2012.<sup>135</sup>

### **Progress on maternal mortality, but a significant problem remains**

There has been real progress in reducing maternal mortality. The number of women dying in pregnancy and childbirth has reduced by almost half since 1990.<sup>136</sup> Three-quarters of the 75 countries where more than 95 percent of maternal and child deaths occur reduced maternal mortality faster in 2000–2013 than in the 1990s.<sup>137</sup> However, these gains have been uneven across and within countries. Women face the greatest risks in sub-Saharan Africa: the region which has the world's highest fertility rate and unmet need for contraception.<sup>138</sup> For example, 16 countries, all of them in sub-Saharan Africa, currently have a very high maternal mortality ratio (500 or more deaths per 100,000 live births).<sup>139</sup> The most vulnerable and excluded women and groups have been left behind including women living in extreme poverty, young women and girls, Dalit women and women living with HIV and AIDS.<sup>140</sup> Much remains to be done and MDG 5 continues to be one of the most off-track of the MDGs.<sup>141</sup>

For every woman who dies due to pregnancy-related causes, 20 or 30 encounter complications with serious or long-lasting consequences. At least 15 percent of all births are complicated by a potentially fatal condition. Women who survive such complications often require lengthy recovery times and may face lasting physical, psychological, social and economic consequences. Although many of these complications are unpredictable, almost all are treatable. Without treatment, these conditions can kill, disable or lead to stillbirths. The costs of medical care and lost productivity can also drive women and their families into poverty. Obstetric fistula, for example, can result in chronic infections, social isolation and deepening poverty.<sup>142</sup>

### **Reluctance to tackle unsafe abortion**

Unsafe abortions are responsible for close to 13 percent of all maternal deaths<sup>143</sup> and a reluctance to tackle this issue is impacting on progress. Despite numerous international commitments to reduce unsafe abortion and investments and policy development in this area from some donors and institutions (such as WHO which developed technical and policy guidance on safe abortion<sup>144</sup>), there remains a reluctance to ensure access to affordable comprehensive abortion care services, particularly for young women and girls. Many initiatives to tackle maternal mortality still fail to address the role of unsafe abortion in maternal deaths and complications and even less adopt a comprehensive approach to the problem.<sup>145</sup>

### **Increased use of contraception but unmet need remains**

The shift in the Global South from large to smaller families is viewed by some as one of the most significant social transformations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>146</sup> Increased use of

contraception is one of the main mechanisms which has reduced fertility levels. The use of modern contraceptive methods by married women aged 15–49 in developing countries rose from negligible levels in the 1960s to an estimated 47 percent in 1990 and 55 percent in 2000. However, this has barely changed over the last decade with 57 percent of married women using modern contraceptives in developing countries in 2012.<sup>147</sup> 222 million women in developing countries have an unmet need for family planning and UNFPA estimates that the unmet need for voluntary family planning will grow by 40 percent in the next 15 years.<sup>148</sup> Research suggests that women with disabilities are particularly likely to have an unmet need for contraception, as they are frequently considered to be asexual and therefore not asked about their sexual health needs.<sup>149</sup>

**Family planning** refers to supplies and services which enable individuals and couples to attain and plan for their desired number of children, and the spacing and timing of births. Supplies include modern contraceptive methods, such as oral pills, injectables, IUDs, hormone-releasing implants, vaginal barrier methods, and male and female condoms. Services include health care, counselling and information and education related to sexual and reproductive health.<sup>150</sup>

### **Lack of donor support**

Financial support for family planning is decreasing, and the gap between needs and available resources is growing. Donor support for family planning declined significantly in the 1990s, reaching an all-time low of US\$394 million in 2006, increasing slightly to US\$462 million in 2007.<sup>151</sup> Funding gaps have remained a persistent problem. In Asia and the Pacific, the funding gap in 2010 for SRHR was US\$6.73 billion.<sup>152</sup> In 2011, of the estimated US\$6.7 billion needed annually for contraceptives worldwide, only US\$3.1 billion had been made available.<sup>153</sup> Some funding is also limited to specific areas of SRHR. For example, the United States is prevented by law from directly addressing the issue of unsafe abortion as part of its aid programme.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, spending in sectors such as emergency response often fails to prioritise family planning services and other emergency reproductive health services.<sup>155</sup>

## **3.3 Challenges and ways forward**

To make real progress, there are a number of areas which require urgent action to empower women and girls to exercise their reproductive and sexual rights and to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health services.

### **Reducing maternal mortality**

It is now widely recognised that there are three key mechanisms that most effectively reduce preventable maternal deaths: provision of emergency obstetric care; ensuring skilled birth attendance; and provision of access to contraception and safe abortion. Provision of each type of intervention could prevent approximately one third of the deaths, and should be available and resourced in an integrated combination. For

example, research suggests that enabling women to plan and space their families will avert 30 percent of maternal deaths.<sup>156</sup> The majority of maternal deaths are preventable and what is required now is not technical solutions, but resources and political will.<sup>157</sup>

Comprehensive sexuality education is also vital (see Part two: Section 5 on Education). There is a need for evidence-based, accurate information about sexual and reproductive health to be accessible to young people. This should be combined with ensuring young people have the knowledge, skills and opportunities to make and negotiate informed, autonomous decisions in relation to healthy, safe and enjoyable sexual relationships. These choices must be free of coercion, subjugation, violence or discrimination.<sup>158</sup>

**Relatively simple and affordable solutions have been identified; the focus must now be on implementing these solutions and addressing the barriers which impede women's access to these interventions.<sup>159</sup> Women, particularly marginalised women, should be involved in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of SRHR programmes, services, policies and laws.<sup>160</sup>**

## Access to contraception

Defining a rights-based approach to family planning is important, and interest in the last few years, particularly from the WHO and the Family Planning 2020 Initiative<sup>161</sup>, is welcome. Barriers and challenges to contraceptives provision include unnecessary policy restrictions, a lack of government commitment and resources, poor quality services, stigma and discrimination from providers, cost, a lack of trained providers, and a lack of contraceptive commodities or the logistics required to ensure they get to where they are needed. Historically, preventative health care has always been less of a priority than curative care, and the politics around reproductive health and choice compound these issues.

Demand for family planning by women and their partners also dramatically varies by country and across communities. Reasons for low demand include social norms and values, a lack of information or misinformation and myths, fear of spousal/parental disapproval, poor quality or non-existent services in close proximity, high cost of services, or the fear that healthcare providers might be judgemental or non-confidential. This last problem is especially true for young people and the poorest and most marginalised women and girls. There is also a lack of access to information about sexual and reproductive health services. An in-depth study of four sub-Saharan African countries found that 60 percent or more of adolescent women and men had poor knowledge about the prevention of unintended pregnancy and HIV and AIDS or believed common misconceptions and one third or more did not know of a source for contraceptives.<sup>162</sup>

**Meeting unmet demand for contraception requires increased funding and political commitment.<sup>163</sup> To uphold reproductive rights, a full method mix of quality contraceptives must be available, affordable, in the right place where and when needed, accessible, and appropriate for different groups of users.<sup>164</sup> Services need to be designed to ensure young people know they are welcome and that their specific needs are being met.**

## **Access to safe abortion**

21.6 million women experience an unsafe abortion worldwide each year and unsafe abortion is responsible for close to 13 percent of all maternal deaths.<sup>165</sup> Yet, it remains a contentious issue. Deaths from unsafe abortion happen disproportionately to young women.<sup>166</sup> The first step is to ensure that the law supports women's access to comprehensive safe abortion services. In countries where the number of circumstances under which an abortion can be provided have been increased such as Nepal, Ethiopia and South Africa, there have been significant reductions in maternal mortality.<sup>167</sup> However, it is also important to address other issues to access such as cost, training providers, social norms and knowledge about the legal environment. In India, for example, where an abortion can be provided on social or economic grounds, around 70 percent of women still think that seeking abortion services is illegal in all circumstances.<sup>168</sup>

The development of low-cost medication that can induce abortion with few side effects and without the need for surgical intervention has also been revolutionary for women's reproductive health.<sup>169</sup> Not only is medical abortion a safe and effective way to carry out abortions at minimal cost, it has significant potential to increase access to safe abortion, particularly in remote areas where health infrastructure may be limited.<sup>170</sup>

**It is critical that the law supports women's access to comprehensive safe abortion services and that investment in family planning and safe abortion programmes should be prioritised together with increasing access to, and awareness of, medical abortion programmes.**

## **Accessible and affordable health services**

The poorest people, the majority of whom are women, face barriers in accessing healthcare services. Transport may be unavailable or too costly or the services themselves may be too expensive. Further, the stigma associated with age, disability, ethnicity, sexuality, caste, HIV status or marital status can also prevent people from accessing quality health services.<sup>171</sup> For example, discrimination prevents transgender people in India from getting access to specific HIV and AIDS and SRHR services.<sup>172</sup> In conflict and humanitarian emergencies, where support structures and social networks are destroyed, emergency responses rarely include adequate reproductive and sexual health services.<sup>173</sup> Stigma is a barrier for young women and girls in accessing

reproductive and sexual health services, particularly if they are unmarried and especially if parental or spousal consent is needed. Furthermore, services are often unresponsive to their needs.

Poor quality health services and a lack of essential medical supplies and equipment is compounded by the acute shortage of trained health workers, as well as the over-medicalisation of services which could be provided safely and effectively by mid or lower-level providers. Currently, there is a need for more than 3.5 million health workers worldwide.<sup>174</sup> Integrating sexual and reproductive health and HIV and AIDS programmes could result in significant public health benefits such as improved coverage, quality and more cost-effective comprehensive programmes with greater impact.<sup>175</sup> This is particularly important given current questions about the relationship between HIV and AIDS and some forms of contraception: and the proposed trial of hormonal contraceptives by the Evidence for Contraceptive Options and HIV Outcomes (ECHO) Consortium.<sup>176</sup>

**Governments must ensure that well-funded, quality health services are accessible and affordable to all. In order to reach the poorest and most marginalised women, services should be free at the point of use and culturally appropriate. Increased investment is needed in reproductive and maternal health services in order to meet the growing demand for SRHR services including the training of more health workers and access to medical supplies and equipment including contraceptives.<sup>177</sup> Programmes should support equitable access to quality contraception, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and HIV and AIDS services for all girls and women regardless of age, marital status, HIV status and socio-economic background, and without the need for parental or spousal consent.<sup>178</sup>**

## Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

Allowing women to control their fertility and exercise sexual and reproductive rights should go beyond the provision of family planning to recognising the context in which many women live. VAWG profoundly limits women's ability to manage and control their SRHR (see Part two: Section 2 on VAWG). FGM has been recognised internationally as a severe form of violence.<sup>179</sup> Over 125 million girls and women have been subjected to FGM and an additional 30 million girls are at risk over the next 10 years.<sup>180</sup> FGM is a manifestation of social norms which control women and girl's sexuality and consider their bodies, their sexuality and their future, to be the property of others.<sup>181</sup> Over 30 percent of girls in developing countries marry before 18 years of age.<sup>182</sup> Child, early and forced marriage holds back 15 million girls a year;<sup>183</sup> it violates a girl's right to choose freely if, when, how and with whom to have sex or to marry; and the right to make decisions in relation to having children; and increases the risk of sexually transmitted infection (STIs).<sup>184</sup> Furthermore, it robs girls of the opportunity for education, skills, and social networks that could empower them for a healthier life.<sup>185</sup>

Ensuring access to and fulfilment of SRHR is a key strategy to both address violence, and to support women and girls who have experienced violence. VAWG can expose women and girls to unwanted and high-risk pregnancies, unsafe abortion, STIs (including HIV and AIDS) and long-term gynaecological and psychological problems. Clinical services are therefore an essential, yet frequently overlooked, component of a comprehensive response to addressing VAWG.

**The impact of VAWG on women's and girl's ability to manage and control their SRHR must be acknowledged. Further, the fulfilment of SRHR and access to adequate services should be recognised as a key component of a comprehensive approach to VAWG. This includes services for women and girls who have experienced FGM and/or child, early and forced marriage which are developed in consultation with girls and women who have experienced these forms of VAWG, including women living with HIV and AIDS.<sup>186</sup>**

## Sexual rights

Sexual rights protect all people's right to be allowed to fulfil and express their sexuality, with due regard for the rights of others and within a framework of non-discrimination. This includes freedom of thought and expression in relation to sexuality, sexual orientation, gender identity.<sup>187</sup> Stigma and discrimination are rife, and this issue remains one of the most contentious in international fora.<sup>188</sup> 76 countries continue to criminalise at least some aspect of private, consensual same sex relationships.<sup>189</sup> In many more cases, discrimination, including on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity, prevents citizens from accessing services and public goods and from participating fully in society free from fear, threat or harm.

**As a first step, governments should repeal laws, policies and practices that have the effect of increasing stigma and discrimination against women, men and young people on the grounds of sex, sexuality, sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>190</sup> States should accept their duty to respect, protect and fulfil the sexual rights of all.**

## Conflict settings, fragile states and emergency situations

Women are disproportionately affected in conflict and humanitarian crisis and are at a heightened risk of maternal and neonatal mortality and sexual violence in fragile states and emergency settings. Over 50 percent of the 536,000 maternal deaths each year occur in fragile states where the average health spend is just US\$9 per person per year.<sup>191</sup> Rape and forced pregnancy as a tactic in conflicts have been documented in a number of conflict-affected countries including Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan (see Section 1 on WPS).

However, reproductive health services are often forgotten or seen as irrelevant or ‘non-life saving’ in humanitarian emergencies and conflict/post-conflict environments, leaving refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), and other affected groups without access. From the onset of an emergency, the Minimum Initial Service Package,<sup>192</sup> for reproductive health in emergencies should be implemented and as soon as the situation allows, comprehensive reproductive health services should be provided. In cases where women have experienced sexual violence in conflict, medical care should include access to safe abortion and post-abortion care services, in compliance with international law.

**The provision of emergency reproductive health services in humanitarian and conflict contexts is essential to fulfilling women’s and girls’ rights. SRHR services for all women and girls should be prioritised in post-conflict and emergency settings and recognised as life-saving.**

### **3.4 Recommendations**

International institutions/governments should:

1. Improve access to rights-based family planning, skilled attendance at delivery, emergency obstetric care and safe abortion.
2. Ensure that quality sexual and reproductive health services are accessible and affordable to all.
3. Design services and provide information for adolescent girls to meet their specific needs.
4. Mobilise increased resources for sexual, reproductive, maternal and health services including in conflict-affected and humanitarian settings.
5. Ensure the regular supply of reproductive health commodities including contraceptives, abortion equipment and medication.
6. Ensure that policy is evidence-informed, rights-based and reinforces measures to promote, protect and fulfil sexual and reproductive rights and achieve gender equality.

## 4. Women's Participation and Influence in Decision Making

*"In the meetings, it was all men and then me, little Bertha. My chair was in the corner, outside their circle. I sat there and listened in meeting after meeting, wondering when I would be invited to speak. After a whole month had passed by without my saying a word, I finally went up to one of the leaders and asked him when they would let me contribute. He said 'Bertha... you have had a whole month to move your chair into the circle..!' That was my first lesson in politics: I learnt that not only can I not let them exclude me - I also mustn't exclude myself. They put my chair in the corner, but it is up to me to move it - both literally and politically speaking."*

Bertha Zapeta, from the indigenous organisation Makatitlan, Guatemala.<sup>193</sup>

### 4.1 The Issues

Governance systems, structures and processes are ultimately weaker where they do not fully include women's voices and perspectives. Women's equal and meaningful participation and influence in decision making at all levels, and in both formal and informal spaces, is fundamentally a question of social justice – women have the right to participate in decisions which affect their lives. In turn, women's political participation and influence, and lack thereof, promotes and impacts public perceptions of women as leaders and decision makers. Women's participation and influence in decision making requires responsive and accountable governance to ensure that the priorities, skills and needs of women are reflected in the policies, laws, institutions and service delivery by community, local, national and international governance structures.<sup>194</sup>

The importance of this issue in achieving gender equality has not always been recognised, and when it has been, the definition of 'women's political participation' has frequently been too narrow, focussing primarily on the numbers of women represented in national institutions, particularly national parliaments. However, there is growing recognition that numerical representation of women is insufficient. Women must be empowered to put forward their priorities, opinions, experiences and needs in order to have influence over decision making. Greater acknowledgement is needed that participation and meaningful engagement in decision making should occur at all levels, including international, national, local, community and household levels in both formal and informal settings.

**Women's participation** refers to women's ability to participate equally with men, at all levels, and in all aspects of household, public and political life and decision making, including activism.<sup>195</sup>

The term '**participation and influence**' refers to the **equal and meaningful participation** of women in decision making. This means considering not only if women are represented but also the extent to which they are able to be actively involved and influence decision making processes through their participation.

Women's unequal access to resources and opportunities, in addition to discriminatory social norms across societies and gendered power imbalances within households and

communities, impact on women’s participation and influence at all levels of decision making, including the extent to which they are perceived as effective leaders. These barriers prevent many women from pursuing opportunities to participate in public or political life, and undermine the extent to which they are able to be involved in, and influence, decision making processes from the household to international levels. Women from poor and marginalised groups, such as ethnic minority and indigenous women, disabled women and older women, are often further excluded from decision making processes.

**What does the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) Say?**

- Take measures to ensure women’s equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making.
- Increase women’s capacity to participate in decision making and leadership.<sup>196</sup>

**4.2 What’s happened in the last 20 years?**

**Growing Recognition**

Over the past two decades, women’s right to participate fully and equally with men in all aspects of decision making has been enshrined in a number of human rights instruments, international resolutions, national constitutions and laws (see box below). Significantly, the proportion of women in national parliaments was included in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as one of the key indicators for the achievement of gender equality.

There is also an emerging recognition that numerical representation must be coupled with influence, and that engagement in decision making at all levels is an essential tool for achieving gender equality.<sup>197</sup> However, as discussed below, measurement of women’s political participation has continued to focus largely on the numbers of women in national parliaments.

**Some progress on numbers at the national level**

In recent years, women’s representation in formal political position has increased. For example, as at January 2014, there were 15 female Heads of State.<sup>198</sup> Women’s representation in national parliaments has also improved. In 1997, 11.7 percent of national parliamentarians were female. By October 2014, female representation (combining lower and upper houses) had increased to 21.8 percent.<sup>199</sup> However, this is not consistent across countries, regions and contexts. The Middle East and North Africa, the Pacific and Asia have particularly low representation of women in national parliaments, with 16 percent, 16.2 and 18.4 percent respectively.<sup>200</sup> Post-conflict countries also lag behind the global average.<sup>201</sup> Based on current trends in representation, women will not be equally represented in parliaments until 2065, and will not make up half the world’s leaders until 2134.<sup>202</sup>

Affirmative action is key. For example, quotas have contributed significantly to progress that has been made in increased numerical representation of women in parliaments and local government structures.<sup>203</sup> Research shows that unless women constitute a minimum of one quarter to one third of a body's membership, their meaningful participation can be limited.<sup>204</sup> Increasing the numerical representation of women through quotas can also contribute to changes in institutional culture and improve attitudes towards the legitimacy and value of women's leadership.<sup>205</sup> A 30 percent target for female representation as a minimum (as mandated by the United Nations Economic and Social Council) would help to enable women to reach the critical mass required to impact decision making. However, there are well-documented concerns that quotas do not guarantee increased influence for women and it is therefore critical that numerical targets form part of a broader comprehensive approach.<sup>206</sup>

### **International Frameworks on political participation and influence**

The equal right of all people to participate in public affairs is protected by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 25) and is enshrined in UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Article 7 which stipulates that Governments should take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life and Article 8 which provides for the participation of women in international organisations and decision making. Important supplementary agreements rights include Gen Rec. No. 25 (2004) of the CEDAW Committee; UN General Assembly Resolution 66/130 (2011) on Women and Political Participation; and UNSCR 2122 (2013) and the African Women's Rights Protocol (Article 9).

The Millennium Development Goal 3 (gender equality and women's empowerment) includes as an indicator the "proportion of seats held by women in national parliament".

UNSCR 1325 and subsequent Women, Peace and Security (WPS) resolutions have been an important development at the policy level, calling for the equal participation and full involvement of women in the maintenance and promotion of sustainable peace (see Part two: Section 1 on WPS).

Some regional frameworks have set specific targets for the representation of women in decision making such as the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Gender and Development (2008) which requires that "States Parties shall endeavour that, by 2015, at least 50 percent of decision making positions in the public and private sectors are held by women".

### **Numbers do not necessarily mean influence**

Women play a vital role in decision making structures. Research shows that female parliamentarians are more likely than men to prioritise social issues such as child care, equal pay, parental leave, and pensions and issues such as reproductive rights, physical safety, and violence against women and girls.<sup>207</sup> However, an overall increase

in the numbers of women in politics has not in all cases led to women's active involvement or allowed them to influence decision making processes. Yet, current measures and targets in relation to women's representation in decision making continue to focus on numbers. For example, the female representation in parliament indicator in MDG 3 does not measure whether women are able to meaningfully participate once elected or women's wider engagement in public life.<sup>208</sup>

### **Continued focus on national levels**

Despite some improvement in the representation of women in formal national political processes, women continue to be marginalised in other decision making spheres. At local levels, women remain under-represented numerically and lack influence in the structures and institutions that govern their everyday lives. Women account for only 20 percent of elected councillors; and hold mayoral positions in only 10 of the world's 195 capital cities.<sup>209</sup> Although this is slowly changing, initiatives over the past 20 years have tended to focus on promoting women's participation in formal, national level political processes rather than women's participation at local or community levels. Significantly, where gains have been made by women at the local and community levels, these often go unrecognised due to a lack of comprehensive data collection.<sup>210</sup>

### **4.3 Challenges and way forward**

To make real progress, there are a number of areas which require urgent action to empower women, and girls as appropriate, to participate in and influence decision making at all levels. Importantly, the measures required must be context-specific and determined in consultation with women and girls. For example, barriers to women's participation in decision making may be exacerbated in humanitarian and conflict-affected settings. However, conflict-affected environments can provide new space for women as systems and governance structures are being rebuilt <sup>211</sup> (see Part two: Section 1 on WPS).

**In all contexts though, it is important that women's equal and meaningful participation in decision making at all levels is recognised as a fundamental human right and valued as an important end in itself.**

### **Tackling discriminatory cultural and social barriers**

Discriminatory social norms, including attitudes towards women's participation in decision making, act as a fundamental barrier to women's influence in public and political life (see Part two: Section 8 on Social Norms). Politics, public office and decision making at all levels are often viewed as the preserve of men and negative attitudes towards women's participation perpetuate myths that women cannot or should not take on leadership roles or participate in decision making. Research conducted in 70 countries showed a statistically significant relationship between the number of women represented in parliament and public attitudes to women in politics.<sup>212</sup> Discriminatory social norms also impact on women's participation in community life and

decision making within the household. This includes limitations on women's freedom of movement, acceptance of male violence against women, unpaid caring responsibilities and other discriminatory perceptions as to women's role in society.

Women's transgression against these discriminatory social norms can also result in violence. For example, VAWG can increase as women move into public and political life limiting their freedom of movement and impacting on their safety and security.<sup>213</sup> In 2013, Bolivia passed a law against political VAWG recognising the seriousness of explicit threats and security risks faced by women candidates and campaign activists.<sup>214</sup> In Afghanistan, a 25 percent quota has led to some progress in women's representation in the lower house of the national parliament, but threats to the safety of female politicians still restrict their ability to participate fully in public life.<sup>215</sup>

**Programmes and policies to support women's participation must tackle discriminatory social norms that are a barrier to women's participation in decision making at all levels. This should include attitudes that perpetuate the myth that women are not suitable public and political leaders. This will require a long-term approach and must continue once women become leaders.**<sup>216</sup>

### Measuring meaningful influence, and participation at all levels

Beyond top-line data, which captures the representation of women in national parliaments, measurement of women's influence in decision making at other levels, including local and household decision making, is frequently missing from international datasets. Measurement needs to go beyond this in two key ways.

Firstly, data on the participation of women in local governance structures should be comprehensively captured. For example, there are gaps in data on women's participation in local or community politics and community organisations as well as informal or traditional governance mechanisms. There is also a shortage of nationally collated data on intra-household decision making, for example in relation to control over income or control over family planning decisions.<sup>217</sup> There have been some encouraging developments, such as the partnership between UN Women and United Cities and Local Governments to collect local data on women's participation and to create a world observatory to track gender equality at the local level,<sup>218</sup> as well as the development of more innovative measures such as the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index, which include indicators to measure community leadership.<sup>219</sup> Work is also being carried out by women's rights organisations to establish local level indicators.<sup>220</sup>

Secondly, data collection must also capture the extent to which women can equally and meaningfully participate in decision making at all levels. This includes measuring changes in attitudes towards women, and tracking advances in policy or legislation that have been effected or influenced by women.

**Indicators for women’s political participation must go beyond the measurement of numbers of nationally elected officials to reflect the influence of women in all levels of decision making, including local, community and household. An internationally-accepted indicator related to local level participation and influence is needed to increase progress in this area.**

### **Women’s participation in local decision making structures**

Supporting women’s local level participation and leadership is crucial because it is at this level that many of the decisions that affect women’s lives are being made.<sup>221</sup> Women’s equal and meaningful participation is essential to ensure that the needs and priorities of women are reflected in local decision making processes. For example, in Nepal, over 40 percent of women involved in a women’s leadership programme in community decision making reported being able to positively influence their village and district development committees, compared to just two percent in comparable non-participating villages.<sup>222</sup>

Local level participation can also provide critical opportunities for women to assume leadership positions which are often overlooked such as in non-governmental organisations, clubs and community centres.<sup>223</sup> Furthermore, women’s influence often takes place through informal mechanisms such as self-help groups, women’s rights organisations and networks community groups and cooperatives, which are typically missing from measures of, and interventions to increase, women’s participation and influence in decision making.

**Interventions should include a focus on women’s influence in local and community decision making bodies where it often has the most direct impact on women’s lives.**

### **Access to resources, social networks and education**

Women often lack access to the financial resources and social networks necessary to run for political office or to make the most of other opportunities to participate in public, political, economic or social life. Inequalities in access to education or training can also undermine women’s confidence to participate in decision making as well as their opportunities to do so.<sup>224</sup> The same barriers apply to local level decision making spaces and processes. Supporting women’s capacity to negotiate and influence effectively is key to increasing the efficacy of women’s leadership once in positions of power.<sup>225</sup> As a result, some women’s rights organisations deliver long-term ongoing support to women leaders at all levels, through initiatives such as leadership capacity-building programmes, mentoring, and technical and legal advice.<sup>226</sup>

Direct support to women should take a long-term approach that begins long before and continues once women have access to decision making spheres.<sup>227</sup> It should include a range of apprenticeship opportunities that empower women by supporting their skills, confidence and networks to participate effectively in decision making.<sup>228</sup> Particular focus is needed to increase the participation and influence of poor and marginalised women. Women’s collective action and women’s rights organisations which provide critical support for elected and aspiring women leaders, must be adequately resourced and supported.

#### 4.4 Recommendations

International institutions/governments should:

1. Give greater priority to increasing women’s political participation and influence in decision making as a central component of achieving gender equality and women’s rights, including in conflict and fragile settings (see Part two: Section 1 on WPS).
2. Work to tackle the discriminatory social norms and attitudes which assign women to domestic spheres and suggest that public decision making is primarily a man’s domain (See Part two: Section 8 on Social Norms and Part two: Section 7 on Care).
3. Recognise that supporting women’s confidence and capacity to participate in and influence political decision making should be approached as a long-term process that will require appropriate funding, particularly for women’s rights organisations, and should focus especially on marginalised and excluded women.
4. Use indicators that measure women’s influence as well as participation in political decision making from household to international levels, with an explicit focus on bringing the importance of women’s local level leadership to the fore.

## 5. Education

*"Education for girls is very important— when an educated girl grows up she can build her family as she wants to. If I was not educated then I would be cheated out of my rights, my rights to my inherited property, but being educated I know my rights, I am empowered. The curriculum is an important part of this — here in Bangladesh the curriculum should focus more on rights for women regarding property, life skills for women and girls, realistic life lessons"*

Shadya Sahanarca, teacher in Ambagicha Government Primary School, Bangladesh<sup>229</sup>

### 5.1 The Issues

Every woman and girl has the right to education. However, girls and young women, especially those from the poorest families, continue to be denied such opportunities.<sup>230</sup> Despite significant progress in gender parity in primary school education, girls remain less likely to complete their education as the pressures of poverty and discrimination

take their toll.<sup>231</sup> Girls' lack of reproductive rights can also lead to pregnancy and exclusion from school.

Women should be enabled to benefit from an ongoing acquisition of knowledge and skills, including through formal education and training, throughout their lives. However, gender inequalities in education have meant that many women have been denied access to these opportunities. Two-thirds of the world's people who are illiterate are women,<sup>232</sup> and over 100 million young women living in low and lower-middle-income countries are unable to read a single sentence.<sup>233</sup>

**Education** is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace...Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change.<sup>234</sup> Education includes primary, secondary, vocational, and university levels of formal education as well as learning that occurs in informal ways, including volunteer activity, unremunerated work and traditional knowledge.<sup>235</sup>

A lack of access to opportunities for education affects the health, earning potential, status and the choices available to women and girls.<sup>236</sup> The poorest and most marginalised women and girls are particularly affected. For example, girls' disadvantaged position in accessing education has been shown to have a particular impact on the control women and girls have over household income and decision making and the incidence of child marriage and intimate partner violence.<sup>237</sup> It is estimated that if all girls had primary education in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, child marriage would fall by 14 percent and if they had secondary education it would fall by 64 percent.<sup>238</sup> In Pakistan, while only 30 percent of women with no education believe they can have a say over the number of children they have, the share increases to 63 percent among women with lower secondary education.<sup>239</sup> Research has also concluded that each additional year of education can improve women's wages by 10 to 20 percent.<sup>240</sup>

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| <p><b>What does the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) Say?</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure equal access to education</li> <li>• Eradicate illiteracy among women</li> <li>• Improve women's access to vocational training, science, technology, and continuing education</li> <li>• Develop non-discriminatory education and training</li> <li>• Allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reform</li> <li>• Promote lifelong education and training for girls and women<sup>241</sup></li> </ul> |
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## 5.2 What's happened in the last 20 years?

### Recognition and impetus for action

Since the Education for All movement and the setting of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, there has been deliberate action at the global and national levels to reform school systems and to increase the enrolment of both boys and girls in primary schools.<sup>242</sup> For example, the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) launched in 2000 is a partnership of organisations committed to accelerating action on girls' education.<sup>243</sup> Commitments have also been reflected in a number of international frameworks (see below) including the MDGs. Research revealed that MDG 3 had provided a form of externally driven legitimacy to developing a focus on gender in education work.<sup>244</sup> The Dakar framework for Action: Education for All represents the most significant international political commitment towards promoting education of women and girls. It contains concrete actions adopted by the participants at the World Education Forum in 2000 which specifically relate to girls' education and women's literacy (see box below).

In recent years, many organisations have emerged to champion girl's education, and an evidence base in support of the benefits has developed. These benefits, ranging from improved health outcomes for children, lower maternal mortality and increased economic opportunities for women, are now widely recognised.

#### International Frameworks on Education

Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to education".

In Article 7 of the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) participants in the World Education Forum committed to concrete goals including (ii) ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality; (iv) achieving a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women; and (v) eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.<sup>245</sup>

Article 10 of UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) urges countries to ensure that women have the same opportunities as men in all aspects of education and training. The Convention on the Rights of the Child also includes the right to education for all children (articles 28 and 29).

MDG 2 focuses on universal primary education - for girls and boys alike to complete a full course of primary schooling. The specific target for MDG3 reflects the commitments in both the *BPfA* and *Education for All* to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education.

## **Progress on primary education**

The number of out-of-school girls at primary school level has dropped from 58.9 million in 2000 to 30.7 million in 2012. During this same period, the share of girls that make up the out-of school population has decreased from 58 to 53 percent.<sup>246</sup>

However, progress has been uneven across countries and large gender inequalities remain. Only 60 percent of countries had achieved parity in primary education in 2011 and only 38 percent of countries had achieved parity in secondary education.<sup>247</sup> Among low-income countries, just 20 percent had achieved gender parity at the primary level, 10 percent at the lower secondary level and 8 percent at the upper secondary level.<sup>248</sup> The 7 million more girls out of school than boys is disproportionately concentrated in a handful of countries including Somalia, Afghanistan, Togo, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>249</sup> Further, progress has plateaued since 2008 which may have been due, in part, to the global recession and associated decreased funding.<sup>250</sup> In 2001, there were 14.4 million more girls out of school at primary age than boys. In 2008, this figure dropped to 4.1 million, but between 2008 and 2011 progress halted.<sup>251</sup> Girls who suffer from multiple forms of discrimination are also more likely to be excluded from education, with inherited disadvantages such as poverty, ethnicity, or living in a rural area or a slum more likely to keep girls out of school than boys.<sup>252</sup> At current trends, the poorest girls in sub-Saharan Africa will not achieve universal primary completion until 2086.<sup>253</sup> Disabled girls also face multiple barriers to accessing education and it is estimated that only 42 percent of disabled girls complete primary school.<sup>254</sup>

## **Higher education**

Gender disparities become more prevalent at higher levels of education with barriers to education tending to increase at the secondary and tertiary levels. Adolescent girls face multiple barriers to accessing quality education due to a range of factors such as violence, social norms which do not value girls' education, child, early and forced marriage and domestic responsibilities. There are 34 million female adolescents out of school missing out on the chance to learn vital skills for work.<sup>255</sup> Regardless of wealth or location of the household, girls of lower secondary age are more likely to be out of school than boys.<sup>256</sup> In sub-Saharan Africa, the gender gap in secondary enrolment widened between 2000 and 2006, with the gender enrolment ratio falling from 82 to 80 girls for every boy in secondary school.<sup>257</sup> The gender gap is further exacerbated at tertiary levels of education in developing countries.

## **Disappointing progress on women's literacy**

Reflecting years of poor education quality and unmet learning needs, 493 million women are illiterate, accounting for almost two-thirds of the world's 774 million illiterate adults.<sup>258</sup> Over recent years, women's literacy has barely progressed at all and has attracted very little investment.<sup>259</sup> Marginalised women are particularly affected. For example, women with disabilities are rarely reached by adult literacy campaigns and their rates of literacy are extremely low.<sup>260</sup>

### 5.3 Challenges and ways forward

Much of the donor discourse on girls' education has focused on enrolment. Yet, there are a number of areas which present key challenges for girls' and women's access, attendance and achievement at school and which require action to tackle the underlying structures which are crucial to opening up educational opportunities for women and girls.

#### Violence against girls in schools

There is growing recognition that violence against girls or the fear of violence – both while travelling to, and at school - is a barrier to education for millions of girls.<sup>261</sup> It can take many forms including sexual harassment, intimidation, teasing, abuse, assault and rape, corporal punishment, bullying, verbal and psychological abuse and the use of students for free labour, and can be perpetrated by other students, teachers, other school employees, bus and taxi drivers and community members. The issue affects girls across all countries, and will also be an issue for adult women attending educational courses. Factors such as poverty, conflict and travelling long distances to school expose girls to a greater risk of violence. WHO estimates that 150 million girls are sexually assaulted each year, with many of these acts occurring at or on the way to school.<sup>262</sup>

**Effective national laws, policies and programmes can empower schools, communities, parents and children jointly to confront the violence against girls in schools. There is a growing consensus that key solutions include recruiting more female teachers, school codes of conduct that address violence in schools, challenging prejudice and fundamentalism in the wider community, creating safe and empowering spaces for girls, empowering women to engage in school governing bodies, and creating confidential reporting mechanisms with links to the support services and the justice sector.**

#### Barriers to enrolling, attending and achieving at school

In addition to violence against girls in schools, there are a number of other substantial barriers to the enrolment, attendance and achievement of female students. The interaction between gender and poverty is a potent source of exclusion. When families have limited resources, boys are often given preference over girls for school attendance. This is further exacerbated in times of disaster and household economic shocks.<sup>263</sup> The disproportionate burden of unpaid care work borne by girls, which is compounded in poor households, also impacts on their ability to access education as well as impacting on time for study and achievement at school (see Part two: Section 7 on Care).<sup>264</sup> A girl with disability faces double discrimination and is even less likely to attend school, and more likely to drop out.<sup>265</sup>

Social norms frequently perpetuate the idea that girls' education is not valuable due to son preference within households or due to the fact that education for boys is seen as resulting in greater returns.<sup>266</sup> For example, with the labour market rewarding boys' schooling more than girls' or social norms meaning that a girl's income enriches her in-laws rather than her parents.<sup>267</sup> Education is also often seen as less relevant for girls given their unpaid care roles (see Part two: Section 8 on Social Norms). These expectations can be internalised by girls who do have the opportunity to access education and can impact on their performance.<sup>268</sup>

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) provision for the specific needs of girls in school is important. Adolescent girls require access to menstrual hygiene facilities in school. Girls often have to stay at home if they are unable to manage menstruation safely or with dignity. This affects their academic performance and many girls drop out of school permanently.<sup>269</sup> Furthermore, girls' time burden associated with fetching water or finding a safe place to defecate in the open is reduced with the provision of WASH facilities.

Pregnancy and child, early and forced marriage have a significant impact on a girl's opportunity to complete her education. The lack of sexual health education and dearth of contraceptive options mean that many girls lack the knowledge to prevent unwanted pregnancies. When teenage pregnancy occurs, discriminatory social norms and responses such as early marriage frequently prevent pregnant girls from completing their studies.<sup>270</sup> Child marriage also pushes girls out of education at the same time, but remaining in education acts as the best means for protecting girls against child marriage.<sup>271</sup>

**Education initiatives need to take into account the multiple barriers which impact on girls' access to and achievement in school. The needs and experiences of the poorest and most marginalised girls must be prioritised. An integrated framework for action, which focuses on the availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability of education for girls is crucial.<sup>272</sup>**

## Gender-sensitive education

Putting emphasis on the enrolment of girls in schools has obscured the impact of gendered power relations within schools on the quality of education.<sup>273</sup> Curriculums are often not gender-sensitive and can perpetuate unequal social norms. Skills such as problem-solving, life skills, questioning or debate which might help to interrogate discriminatory attitudes towards girls or develop their leadership skills and confidence are also not typically promoted.<sup>274</sup>

The challenges girls face accessing or completing their education can be compounded by a shortage of female teachers to provide role models for students<sup>275</sup> together with a lack of qualified teachers to ensure high quality education.<sup>276</sup> Worldwide, girls who

already face disadvantage are much less likely to be taught by good teachers and there is a shortage of female teachers in disadvantaged areas and particularly in countries with wide gender disparity in enrolment.<sup>277</sup> Both male and female teachers must recognise that their own attitudes and expectations in relation to gender will impact on the learning experiences of boys and girls.

**Gender-sensitive curriculums should be developed and more female teachers must be recruited, especially in rural areas and at secondary levels and provided with incentives, such as safe housing, to work in disadvantaged areas.**<sup>278</sup>

## Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Comprehensive sexuality education aims to provide clear, well-informed, and scientifically-grounded sexuality education to enable young people to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights and to make informed choices about their sexuality, health and relationships (see Part two: Section 3 on SRHR).<sup>279</sup> Rather than leading to an increase in sexual activity, it has been demonstrated that comprehensive sexuality education can lead to a delay in sexual intercourse, reduce the frequency of sex and unprotected intercourse, decrease the number of sexual partners and lead to an increase in the use of condoms and other contraceptives.<sup>280</sup> However, in many countries access to necessary information about sexuality and sexual and reproductive health services is restricted. Attitudes and laws often stifle the discussion of sexuality, and subjects such as contraception, abortion and sexual diversity are frequently taboo.<sup>281</sup> A number of studies carried out in the African region reveal that almost half of those who received sexual education received no information on key topics such as contraception, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), pregnancy and the right to refuse sex.<sup>282</sup>

**Countries and governments must commit to enacting and implementing laws to allow universal access to Comprehensive Sexuality Education through well-designed modes of delivery. Evidence has shown successful implementation is possible even in very conservative environments.**<sup>283</sup>

## Adult literacy

A focus on formal adult education and informal educational opportunities for women, and particularly marginalised women, is also frequently overlooked. Women should be enabled to benefit from an ongoing acquisition of knowledge and skills. In 2012, 781 million adults and 126 million youth worldwide lacked basic reading and writing skills, with women accounting for more than 60 percent of both the illiterate adult and youth populations.<sup>284</sup>

**Specific programmes must be implemented to address women's literacy and open educational opportunities for women especially those who were not able to access education previously.**

## Financing Education for all

High quality, free, public education must be guaranteed for all, without discrimination.<sup>285</sup> To achieve this, access to post-primary education for girls, including non-formal education opportunities, must be strengthened while meeting commitments to universal primary education. As well as being disaggregated by gender, data on access to education needs to be disaggregated by poverty level, location and ethnicity within countries to reflect the experiences of the most marginalised girls.

Over the last decade the privatisation of education, through mechanisms such as the promotion of low-fee private schools, state financing of privately managed schools and the encouragement of philanthropic, religious and NGO schools, has changed the education landscape in many developing countries.<sup>286</sup> Low cost private schools are being increasingly promoted by international actors and donors. However, evidence suggests that this trend towards privatisation can have a very harmful effect on girls' education.<sup>287</sup> Fees are often a significant proportion of household income, so parents have to choose which child to send to school, with girls typically missing out.<sup>288</sup> For example, in Ghana, the poorest families have to use 40 percent of their household income just to send one child to a 'low-fee' school.<sup>289</sup>

Aid to education remains relatively low<sup>290</sup> and the Global Partnership for Education, the only multilateral financing institution for education, is still lacking adequate donor support. Significantly, countries with the largest gender gaps (such as Cambodia and Pakistan) often spend a low proportion of their domestic budgets on education.<sup>291</sup>

**It is essential that governments invest in gender-sensitive education systems, facilities and teachers in order to provide access to quality education for all children. States should prioritise the introduction of free public education of high quality and guarantee education to all without discrimination. States should ensure that a sufficient proportion of the national budget is allocated to education financing including improving the quality of education.<sup>292</sup>**

### 5.4 Recommendations

International institutions/governments should:

1. Take action to address violence against women and girls in and out of schools (see Part two: Section 2 on VAWG).
2. Design education initiatives to take into account the multiple barriers which impact on girls' access to and achievement in school at all levels of education, prioritising the needs and experiences of the poorest and most marginalised girls.

3. Provide sufficient funding for high quality free public education and guarantee education to all without discrimination.
4. Implement teacher policies which ensure teachers are motivated and have decent working conditions; that sufficient female teachers are recruited and in senior positions; and that female teachers serve as role models for children in the most disadvantaged and rural areas.
5. Implement specific programmes to address women's literacy and open educational opportunities for women, especially those who were not able to access education previously.

## 6. Women's Economic Equality and Empowerment (WEE)

*"A post-2015 framework can only deliver a new vision if it revisits how economies are sustained and who does and does not have access to and is able to benefit from economic resources. We would particularly want to call for a shift in economic power, opportunities and entitlements in favour of the poor and marginalized, especially women and girls... 'Inclusive economic development'...cannot happen unless women are empowered to drive changes in economies, access decent work opportunities and benefit from these, and unless unpaid care work is taken into account and responsibilities redistributed."*

Letter by Women's Major Group on UNSG's report on the Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit <sup>293</sup>

### 6.1 The Issues

Women's economic equality (WEE) is yet to be achieved in any country; their economic choices, income and control of assets all continue to lag behind those of men.<sup>294</sup> Yet, economic empowerment has a central role to play in the realisation of gender equality and women's rights. Access to and control over income and assets can give women greater independence and choice; the ability to generate an independent income is intimately linked to women's ability to exercise voice and control over their lives.<sup>295</sup> Paid work has the potential to provide women with benefits beyond income, such as new social networks, skills, confidence, and higher aspirations.<sup>296</sup>

**Economic empowerment** is women's capacity to contribute to and benefit from economic activities on terms which recognise the value of their contribution, respect their dignity and make it possible for them to negotiate a fairer distribution of returns.<sup>297</sup>

**Economic equality** is achieved when women have equal access to and control over resources and equal participation and influence in economic decision making.

Much of the donor discourse on women's economic empowerment since Beijing has focused on integrating women into the market economy, and raising the income of

individual women often through jobs or micro-credit programmes. While useful, this response has not substantially increased women’s economic empowerment for a number of reasons.<sup>298</sup> Firstly, income, although important, is not enough. Women’s economic empowerment requires an increase in control over their income and household finances, and greater influence in economic decision making at every level. Upgrading women’s choices over the quality of work they do, and how they spend their time, are also essential components.<sup>299</sup>

The second area of concern is over the failure to recognise the structural barriers that prevent women benefiting from economic opportunities. In particular, interventions frequently have not addressed the ‘enabling environment’ or the non-economic barriers to economic equality such as legal constraints and discriminatory social norms around ‘women’s work’ and unpaid care that justify low pay, limit organising, and reinforce occupational segregation.<sup>300</sup>

Failure to acknowledge and address the ways in which neo-liberal policies have undermined gender equality in general, and women’s economic empowerment specifically has, as we show below, also been a major omission. Governments have frequently not, for example, provided sufficient investment in public services, regulated the work place or created supportive legal frameworks. At the time of the Beijing conference, women’s rights organisations were already calling on governments to address the way in which macro-economic policies, such as structural adjustment programmes, so often caused, perpetuated and depended on women’s economic and social inequality,<sup>301</sup> yet little has changed.

**What does the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) Say?**

- Promote women’s economic rights and independence, including access to employment and appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources.
- Facilitate women’s access to resources, employment, markets, and trade.
- Provide business services, training, and access to markets, information, and technology, particularly to low-income women.
- Strengthen women’s economic capacity and commercial networks.
- Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination.
- Promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men.<sup>302</sup>
- Review, adopt and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and

efforts of women in poverty.

- Revise laws and administrative practices to ensure women's equal rights and access to economic resources.
- Provide women with access to savings and credit mechanisms and institutions.
- Develop gender-based methodologies and conduct research to address the feminization of poverty.<sup>303</sup>

## 6.2 What's happened in the last 20 years?

### Increased recognition

The importance of investing in women's economic empowerment has been increasingly recognised in mainstream economic discourse and policy,<sup>304</sup> for example OECD Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) members have identified women's economic empowerment as a policy priority.<sup>305</sup> Then at the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Summit in 2010, member states agreed that "investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth."<sup>306</sup> However, despite the interest, donor spending on women's economic empowerment remains low.<sup>307</sup> Moreover, the focus has been primarily on the benefits women's economic empowerment will bring to the community through economic growth, rather than on the achievement of women's economic rights.<sup>308</sup> Recently the World Bank has recognised the interrelationship between women's economic empowerment and their voice and agency,<sup>309</sup> and acknowledged that economic growth will not necessarily bring about gender equality, but the International Financial Institutions and most other donors are a long way from integrating and mainstreaming gender in their work in a meaningful way.<sup>310</sup>

### International Frameworks on WEE

MDG 3 includes an indicator which measures an increase in women's share of non-agricultural employment under MDG 3 as well as a target on 'full and productive employment and decent work for all, including for women and young people' under MDG 1.

UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) contains a number of articles relating to women's economic empowerment including equal rights in employment such as equal pay (Article 11); equal rights to family benefits and financial credit (Article 13); rights of rural women including participation in development planning (Article 14); and equal rights of both spouses in the ownership and management of property (Article 16). The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights, in particular articles 2, 3 and 7, is also relevant.

The Guiding Principles on Poverty and Human Rights stipulate that states must ensure that women have equal access to economic opportunities (para 26) and

full and equal legal capacity to own, control and administer economic resources such as land, credit and inheritance (para 27).<sup>311</sup>

There are also a number of ILO Conventions which promote women's rights in employment including Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), and Decent Work for Domestic Workers 2011 (No 189).

### **Opportunities for employment, but not empowerment**

Increased globalisation of the world economy has created some new employment opportunities for women, especially in the manufacturing and non-traditional agricultural export sectors. For example research by the World Bank revealed that in East Asia, growth in the manufacturing sector (particularly textile and food services) has increased women's paid employment.<sup>312</sup> Globally, women's access to paid employment in non-agricultural sectors increased from 35 percent in 1990 to 40 percent in 2012.<sup>313</sup> However, the pace of progress has been slow, and World Bank figures suggest that women's global economic participation has stagnated.<sup>314</sup>

Crucially however, women's greater participation in the market economy over the last two decades has not been accompanied by significant advances in WEE and empowerment. Women continue to earn between 10 and 30 percent less than men for doing comparable jobs,<sup>315</sup> make up nearly two-thirds of the working poor,<sup>316</sup> and are twice as likely as men to be living in extreme poverty.<sup>317</sup> Nor has girls' improved access to education translated into economic empowerment. For example, the World Bank's Adolescent Girls Programme that supported girls to transition from school to work was found to have had positive impacts on earnings, but a weaker impact on empowerment outcomes such as confidence.<sup>318</sup>

### **Quality of work**

Economic growth has not guaranteed access to decent work for women who are still more likely than men to be in informal, insecure and low paid work with limited control over economic decisions.<sup>319</sup> The gender pay gap is evident across the board, among farmers, entrepreneurs and employees.<sup>320</sup> Women remain concentrated in poorly paid part-time jobs and, on average, are paid 10 to 30 percent less than men for comparable work, across all sectors.<sup>321</sup> At the current rate, it will take 75 years to close the gap.<sup>322</sup>

Over half of the world's 120 million working women have jobs that are insecure and typically not protected by adequate social or legal protections.<sup>323</sup> Globally, women are half as likely as men to have full time secure and highly paid jobs;<sup>324</sup> the situation is worst in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia where an estimated 80 percent of women in paid employment have precarious and vulnerable jobs.<sup>325</sup> As a result, women are

also more affected than men by the global trend towards increasing insecurity and precariousness of employment.<sup>326</sup> Women also remain heavily represented in the agriculture sector, where remuneration is lower, comprising on average about 40 percent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries.<sup>327</sup> These women in rural paid work are more likely than men to have part-time, seasonal and low paid jobs.<sup>328</sup> In addition, a substantial proportion of unpaid agricultural work is also carried out by women.<sup>329</sup>

Even women's physical safety is often not guaranteed. Women on factory floors are subject to widespread violence, including sexual violence<sup>330</sup> while others face unsafe working environments. For example in Bangladesh, women account for almost 85 percent of workers in the garment industry and were the majority of those killed in the collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory in April 2013.<sup>331</sup> Migrant workers are amongst the most vulnerable, facing violence and discrimination at each stage of migration. In particular, domestic workers in many countries face abusive working conditions which can be defined as slavery. Although national, global and regional instruments exist to protect women migrant workers, they are seldom applied.<sup>332</sup>

### **Economic assets and entrepreneurs**

An increase in provision of microcredit proved to be beneficial to many women involved, but the global impact was limited.<sup>333</sup> Women continue to have less access to and control over economic assets, credit and productive inputs than men, in part due to discriminatory laws and practices on inheritance, land rights, and finance.<sup>334</sup> Agricultural support to small holders has frequently failed to address the specific needs of women farmers. Firms owned by women in urban areas in Africa have been found to have 2.5 times less start-up capital than those owned by men.<sup>335</sup> Women are also more likely than men to run a single-person business with no employees.<sup>336</sup> As a result, women entrepreneurs tend to be less productive and profitable.<sup>337</sup> The problem is even worse for women in the informal sector.<sup>338</sup> Many of the world's poorest women work on the land, but less than 20 percent of the world's landholders are women – falling to less than five percent in North Africa and West Asia.<sup>339</sup>

### **Austerity measures and limited public services**

Evidence shows that neo-liberal free market-oriented reforms have proved a major brake on women's economic empowerment, and gender equality more broadly.<sup>340</sup> The model, introduced in the 1980s donor-led structural adjustment programmes and still widespread today, is also prone to economic shocks; the response to which has been austerity measures that further diminish the public sector.<sup>341</sup>

Central to these neo-liberal macro-economic policies has been a limiting of the role of the state through privatisation and reduced public spending. Cuts in public spending impacts disproportionately on women partly because most public sector jobs are done by women; a decline in consumption also hits demand in female dominated sectors such as garments, agriculture and electronics further increasing women's

unemployment.<sup>342</sup> UNESCO estimated that the global financial crisis caused 16 million women to lose their employment between 2007 and 2009, and that women were pushed into informal and unsafe jobs at a faster rate than men.<sup>343</sup> The problem is compounded because social norms around women travelling and occupational segregation reduce women's occupational and geographical mobility making it harder to get new work.<sup>344</sup>

As a result of the social norms around care (see Part two: Section 7 on Care), cuts in public provision of child-care, education, health and social protection all lead to an increase in women's unpaid work which, in turn, limits income prospects.<sup>345</sup> For example, research in 2010 on the impact of austerity measures across Europe found that 28 percent of women's part-time work and economic inactivity was explained by an absence of care services.<sup>346</sup> A reliance on regressive indirect taxes, such as VAT (value-added tax), further impacts disproportionately on poorer women's disposable income.<sup>347</sup>

### Gender equality and sustainable development

Gender inequality and unsustainability share common causes and drivers, and are both exacerbated by a market-based economic model which pursues economic growth through exploiting gender inequalities and the environment for profit.<sup>348</sup> This system has led to poverty, environmental degradation, climate change and rising inequality, all of which present barriers for women achieving their rights. It has been recognised, such as in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (2012) that sustainable development cannot be achieved without gender equality.<sup>349</sup> The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action also called for environmental policies and programmes to integrate gender concerns.<sup>350</sup>

Women and girls constitute the majority of those worst impacted by the effects of climate change and environmental degradation and are less likely to have access to environmental resources.<sup>351</sup> It is therefore important to address this disproportionate disadvantage faced by women and girls through gender transformative policies and programmes. Women's decision making power and full, equal and meaningful participation in sustainable development policies and programmes is important to ensure they address gender inequalities and women's rights.<sup>352</sup> However, care must be taken that responses to sustainability challenges do not exacerbate gender stereotypes or increase women's burden of unpaid care without increasing their access to rights and resources.<sup>353</sup>

### Open economies – trade and investment

Opening economies to attract foreign direct investment by transnational corporations was a core element of structural adjustment policies, and continues to be included in more recent donor advice to, and policies designed for, developing countries. One UN report concluded that: "The move of production by transnational corporations to export

processing zones, the reliance on home and sweatshop sectors, and land dispossession by extractives industries are a locus for corporate abuse and violation of human rights, and most of the victims are women.<sup>354</sup> While many women have gained employment in export industries, they have limited bargaining power as these manufacturing industries can move to other locations if conditions change or wages increase.<sup>355</sup> Export processing zones designed to attract foreign companies frequently have few regulations on wages or health and safety and are un-unionised. Women workers in home-work and sweatshops, part of global supply chains, have low wages and few labour rights with the hazardous working conditions in Bangladeshi garment factories among the many examples.<sup>356</sup> The impact on women of land grabs by extractive industries has also been well documented.<sup>357</sup> Furthermore, the tax breaks designed to attract transnational corporations have reduced public resources, and restricted spending on, for example, essential public services.<sup>358</sup>

Another part of the neo-liberal package are the trade agreements that restrict the transfer, development and maintenance of technology, preventing developing countries from adding more value to commodities through processing and industry, and thus acting as a further barrier to increasing women's income in the value chain.<sup>359</sup>

### 6.3 Challenges and ways forward

To make real progress there are a number of structural barriers which need to be addressed to build and enhance WEE and rights. Underlying these is the need to reconsider macro-economic policies and models.

#### Positive social norms

Women's economic inequality is, in part, legitimised and perpetuated by the persistence of social norms around gender roles and 'women's work' which contribute to occupational segregation, low pay, insecure employment and women's disproportionate burden of unpaid care work (see Part two: Section 8 on Social Norms). Significantly, nearly four in ten people globally agree that when jobs are scarce, men should have more rights to jobs than women.<sup>360</sup> These attitudes are compounded by social norms around restrictions of movement and the threat of violence, which further constrain women's choices over work.<sup>361</sup> Discriminatory social norms, which prescribe that women's place is in the home, can result in women who earn income facing social pressure and even retaliation from their partners and community.<sup>362</sup>

**The social norms that currently define occupational segregation, keep women from senior positions in employment and labour movements, perpetuate discriminatory inheritance practices and exclude women from economic decision making, all require attention and redefinition.**<sup>363</sup>

## Investment in social infrastructure

Increasing adult women's paid employment may have unintended consequences if the unpaid care they provide is not replaced by publically provided care services. For example, daughters may be taken out of school to take on caring responsibilities or adult women will experience yet a further decrease in their time as they try to combine caring responsibilities with paid work (see Part two: Section 7 on Care).

Inadequate transport infrastructure as well as a lack of access to local markets, infrastructure, financial training or forums for sourcing credit or goods will also impact on the economic opportunities available to women. For example, women, particularly those living in rural areas, may not be able to take advantage of employment opportunities if safe and affordable transportation is not available to allow them to travel to the workplace.

Substantial improvements are also needed in the type and volume of social protection to achieve universal social provision. Entitlement is still often based on employment contributions, which further discriminate against women.

**Economic empowerment, particularly for the most marginalised women, requires investment in social infrastructure, essential services and social protection.**

## Women's voice and agency

Paid work is most likely to empower women if it offers them dependable income over which they are able to exercise control, together with a sense of self-esteem and recognition.<sup>364</sup> Yet women are excluded from economic decision making at every level. Lack of control over income and limited participation in household decision making continues to be a major barrier to WEE.<sup>365</sup> In the workplace, women are less likely to be unionised than men and are under-represented in senior posts.<sup>366</sup> For example, recent research indicates that women occupy only a quarter of senior management roles.<sup>367</sup>

Whether as local producers or workers in a global supply chain, women who are supported in organising themselves will have improved economic empowerment. Women coming together to promote their own shared interests allows them to pool their resources or to take on new leadership roles.<sup>368</sup> Women producers who organised collectively were found to be more productive, received more income for their products, had better access to market information and had improved access to credit and more decision making power over it.<sup>369</sup>

**Financial and political support is needed for women's organising and women's rights collective action and social movements including trade unions and**

**informal and migrant workers organisations.<sup>370</sup> Furthermore, initiatives to increase women's voice, agency and participation need to extend to economic decision making at all levels, including national governments, the United Nations and International Financial Institutions.**

## Legislation and policies

In a significant number of countries, discriminatory legislation remains, including laws that limit women's access to education, legal capacity, property rights, access to credit, and access to social security.<sup>371</sup> These constraints prevent women from taking advantage of any economic opportunities provided. For example, discriminatory inheritance and property ownership laws means that women have no collateral to access financial support to build their businesses and must rely on personal savings or loans from relatives.<sup>372</sup> In some countries women cannot obtain a business loan from the bank without the signature of their husband or father.<sup>373</sup> In 15 countries, women still require their husband's consent to work.<sup>374</sup>

By contrast, legislation and regulations such as International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions can be introduced to cover, for example, provision for a living wage, equal pay, security of employment, parental rights, safe working conditions and freedom from violence, and the right to organise and to collective bargaining, as well as access to remedy when and if violations occurs. Such legislation should be actively enforced, including through affirmative action where needed.

**Laws and customary practices which discriminate against women, both within and outside marriage, should be removed in order to provide equal rights for women to inherit, own and bequeath land and resources. Legislation and regulations (including ILO Conventions) must be introduced and implemented to support 'decent work'.**

## Corporate responsibility and government regulation

The negative impact of business and trade policies on women has been well documented but inadequately addressed.<sup>375</sup> The response so far has been limited. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives such as the UN Global Compact<sup>376</sup> and Women's Economic Empowerment Principles<sup>377</sup> have been accompanied by calls from civil society for the private sector to analyse the position of women in their global supply chains and promote women's economic empowerment.<sup>378</sup>

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights may provide a useful way forward. The Principles have broad international support, and clearly establish corporate responsibility to respect human rights throughout supply chains and in all business relations and activities. They also recognise the duty of states to protect against corporate abuse, and the duty of both states and corporations to provide

access to remedy where abuse occurs.<sup>379</sup> They even acknowledge, albeit in a very cursory way, that women may face different risks and challenges from men.<sup>380</sup>

**The principles of corporate responsibility must take account of women's different interests and needs and the barriers they face. Corporations must promote human rights throughout their supply chains proactively ensuring decent pay and conditions for workers.<sup>381</sup> Governments have a responsibility to identify, prevent and remedy the harm caused to women by private sector activities.**

### **Donor support for women's economic empowerment**

Despite increased recognition of the importance of women's economic empowerment in mainstream development discourse, there has not been a corresponding increase in donor support to programmes in this area. Analysis of overseas development assistance (ODA) spending to support women's economic empowerment revealed that donor investments in this field have remained flat and unchanged since 2007.<sup>382</sup>

Even more important, better quality aid is needed that recognises and targets the barriers women face, particularly the non-economic barriers, yet there remain knowledge gaps in relation to the effectiveness of women's economic empowerment interventions. A review by Overseas Development Institute (ODI) found that the majority of empirical evidence was focussed on financial service products with limited evaluation of projects working on legal and regulatory frameworks, unions, and fair employment and asset provision.<sup>383</sup>

**An increase in donor support for women's economic empowerment is needed, with a clear focus on addressing the structural barriers to women's economic inequality.**

### **Alternative macro-economic policies**

While there has been a greater integration of women into the market economy, the fundamental shifts in macro-economic policy that were needed are no closer to being achieved. Almost all governments and donors continue to pursue an economic model of growth that takes advantage of women's cheap and poorly regulated labour, reduces the capacity of the state to provide public services, and depends heavily on women's unpaid care to absorb the resulting cuts.<sup>384</sup> It is not, some argue, just that macro-economic policies are failing to secure WEE, it is that women's unequal economic status, particularly their unpaid provision of care services, is a central component to the functioning of the model.<sup>385</sup>

As a starting point, a greater understanding is needed of the interrelationship between economic policies and gender equality, followed by acknowledgement of the issues

caused by current growth models and the development of alternative models. This would include, for example, recognition of the different impact of all policies – including taxation, trade and investment – on women and men with measures to promote gender equality and ensure that women are not disadvantaged. It would also include a greater commitment to the provision of high quality public services, accepting the responsibility of governments to provide care rather than depend on the invisible, unremunerated provision by women within households and communities. States would further recognise and act on their duty to promote greater equality within the work place and ensure decent, stable work with a minimum wage, equal pay, including implementing affirmative action programmes and promoting schemes that guarantee poor women and men work.<sup>386</sup> To succeed, these responses will need to recognise and respond to existing inequalities in intra-household decision making, the variety of family structures, unequal access to resources and employment between men and women, and the importance of the care economy.<sup>387</sup>

**Women’s economic empowerment initiatives will only succeed if they are located within a broader transformation of the power relations which govern economic resources, removing the gender bias that systematically disadvantages women. This will require lasting change in economic decision making, and in the distribution of, access to, and control over resources in favour of women who are marginalised and living in poverty.**<sup>388</sup>

## 6.4 Recommendations

International institutions/governments should:

1. Recognise the duty of states to implement human rights-based economic policies and legislation that promote gender equality including ensuring that women have access to decent employment opportunities, enjoy safe working conditions, receive equal pay for work of equal value and have the right to organise at all stages of global value chain.
2. Recognise the duty of states to implement fiscal policies that, through progressive tax systems and gender-responsive public financial management systems, generate and allocate sufficient income to redress discrimination and inequality, including the provision of universal access to adequate, affordable public services and universal social protection.
3. Put in place and enforce effective and transparent policies and mechanisms that require corporations to comply with international human rights standards and obligations and guarantee access to remedy when violations occur.
4. Repeal discriminatory laws, including customary laws, and actively enforce legislation and regulation promoting women’s full and equal access to land, property, technology, credit and other productive resources.
5. Promote women's leadership, voice and agency at all levels of economic policy making, from household to international levels.

## 7. Unpaid Care

*“This [unpaid care work] is the type of work where we do not earn money but do not have free time either. Our work is not seen but we are not free as well.”* Woman in Patharkot, Nepal interviewed by ActionAid<sup>389</sup>

### 7.1 The Issues

In every country in the world, women and girls spend substantially longer than men and boys on household domestic work and care for children, the elderly and the sick.<sup>390</sup> When this unpaid care is taken into account, women work longer hours than men, but earn substantially less.<sup>391</sup> The time and energy associated with this work limits women’s and girl’s opportunities to access education and income earning activities and to participate in public and political life. Unpaid care work can also be arduous and emotionally stressful and impacts on the mental and physical health of the caregiver.<sup>392</sup> The lack of recognition and low status ascribed to care work further reduces women’s and girls’ status in society, and restricts their political voice and decision making.

In this way, unpaid care work underpins and reinforces every aspect of gender inequality; it restricts women’s agency and autonomy, reinforces stereotypes, and acts as an obstacle to moving out of poverty for many women, girls and their families. Poor and marginalised women and girls, with limited access to public services and technology, carry the heaviest burden.<sup>393</sup>

**Unpaid care work** (which may take place in the household or in the wider community) includes:

- Domestic work such as cooking and food preparation, cleaning, washing clothes, water and fuel collection.
- Direct care of persons including children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and able-bodied adults.<sup>394</sup>

Moreover, women’s disproportionate burden of unpaid care is fundamental to the way economies operate. Unpaid care work underpins economies by maintaining the workforce, nurturing future economic actors and looking after those no longer able to care for themselves. Furthermore, this unpaid work hides and absorbs the negative impacts of cuts to public services, deregulation of labour and the exploitation of natural resources.<sup>395</sup>

### What does the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) Say?

- Eliminate barriers to education for women with children by providing child care options.<sup>396</sup>
- Provide affordable support services such as child care.<sup>397</sup>
- Governments should research the gender impact of economic policies, including the value of women's unpaid work.<sup>398</sup>

## 7.2 What's happened in the last 20 years?

### Emerging consensus on the importance of unpaid care

Although a major issue for women's rights organisations at the time, very little progress has been made since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action highlighted the importance of tackling the unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work between men and women.<sup>399</sup> Unpaid care has been overlooked in development and policy agendas and taken for granted or relied upon as a cost-free and unlimited means of filling gaps in public services.<sup>400</sup> However, there are signs that this may be changing.

In recent years, the issue has finally made its way onto the international political agenda. In 2010, the High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) recognised women's unpaid care work and the need to invest in infrastructure and labour-saving technologies.<sup>401</sup> The UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights produced her report on poverty and unpaid care in August 2013, which provided a clear framework to address unpaid care through a rights-based approach.<sup>402</sup> In 2014, the Open Working Group on the sustainable development goals included a target on unpaid care under its proposed gender goal.<sup>403</sup> There is also increasing awareness of the international frameworks which compel states to address the issue of unpaid care (see box below).

### International Frameworks on unpaid care

UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) expressly notes that state parties must ensure "the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children" (art. 5) and states that parties must take all appropriate measures to modify or abolish laws, regulations, customs and practices that discriminate against women (art. 2(f)). This includes prohibiting discrimination or dismissal on the grounds of pregnancy or maternity and ensuring that men and women have equal opportunities to choose their profession or occupation (see Articles 11.2 and 16). Additionally states must provide "the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life" (art. 11(2)(c) CEDAW).

Various international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities include binding obligations that ought to compel states to address the issue of unpaid care. This is supported by several General Comments of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which stress the need for positive action from states. See for example, CESCR General Comment 16 in relation to the right to work and CESCR General Comment 19 (para. 32) which stipulates that social security and social assistance schemes must take account of women's unequal burden of unpaid care work.<sup>404</sup>

International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions such as Convention No. 156 on workers with family responsibilities, Convention No. 183 on maternity protection and Convention No. 189 concerning decent work for domestic workers are also relevant.<sup>405</sup>

### **Women continue to bear a disproportionate burden**

Women continue to be disproportionately responsible for care work and, on average, spend twice as much time on household work as men and four times as much time on childcare.<sup>406</sup> For girls, this division begins at an early age - a survey in 16 countries found that 10 percent of girls aged 5-14 perform household chores for 28 hours or more weekly (approximately twice the hours spent by boys), with a measurable impact on their school attendance.<sup>407</sup>

The problem is particularly acute for women and girls in poor households with limited access to public services, lack of adequate infrastructure (such as energy and water and sanitation facilities), and lack of resources to pay for care services or time-saving technology.<sup>408</sup> In sub-Saharan Africa, 71 percent of the burden of collecting water for households falls on women and girls, who in total spend 40 billion hours a year collecting water.<sup>409</sup> The long distances women and girls have to travel to collect water and fuel also puts them at increased risk of violence. Unpaid care also entrenches inequality on class, racial and ethnic lines. For example, minority and migrant women are often the most severely affected, combining badly paid work as carers with care for their own households and limited social protection.<sup>410</sup>

Over the past 20 years, increasing numbers of women have taken up paid work, but balancing this work with caring responsibilities frequently means that women are employed on a part-time or piecework basis where pay is lower and employment conditions are precarious (see Part two: Section 6 on WEE).<sup>411</sup> For example, a lack of childcare has been shown to push mothers from formal into informal employment in Botswana, Guatemala, Mexico and Vietnam.<sup>412</sup> The undervaluing of care work has also led to caring professions (where many women work) being categorised as low-skilled, with corresponding low pay and low status.<sup>413</sup> This lack of income further reduces

savings and pensions and perpetuates women's economic disempowerment, both in the household and in wider society.<sup>414</sup>

Contrary to conventional economic thinking, women's increased earnings in the work place have not led to a reallocation of labour within the household. Social norms run deep, and instead women have performed their paid work on top of their unremunerated tasks, or reallocated the tasks to other female members of the household.<sup>415</sup> In other cases, wealthier women have employed other, often migrant, women to perform their caring responsibilities, creating global care chains.<sup>416</sup>

Over the last two decades new challenges have exacerbated the problem. Environmental degradation, leading to, for example, longer journeys to collect fuel and water, further increases women's care work. While in countries heavily affected by HIV and AIDS, women and girls provide between 70 and 90 percent of the care to people living with the disease.<sup>417</sup>

### **7.3 Challenges and ways forward**

The omission of unpaid care from the policy agenda is, in part, evidence of its profound importance. Passing responsibility for ensuring adequate provision of care to the state would require substantial increases in public expenditure, while equalising responsibility for its provision between women and men would question the core of the stereotypes that legitimise so much of gender inequality and which are defended as 'cultural' (see Part two: Section 8 on Social Norms). Moreover, the lack of recognition accorded to those who provide unpaid care means their voices remain unheard.

Explaining and identifying the solutions has also proved a challenge. In the past, the response has been wrongly characterised as 'wages for housework,' or a reduction in the levels of care provided and a limit on women's choices. Today, the advocacy focus is primarily on recognition of the value and contribution of care work and the redistribution of responsibility for its provision.<sup>418</sup>

Ultimately, the aim is to create societies in which unpaid care work is recognised and valued as a crucial social and economic good. In such a society, unpaid care work would be shared more equally between women and men. The state would have responsibility for ensuring high-quality care is accessible to all, including the poorest people in society. Sufficient investment in infrastructure and domestic technology would reduce the time burden and drudgery of care work, while improving the quality of its provision. The people who perform unpaid care work would have greater choices, opportunities, and a voice to participate in politics, the workplace, and social and cultural life.<sup>419</sup>

## Recognising unpaid care work

One way to recognise the value of unpaid care is to count it. As women have entered the paid workforce in growing numbers, and paid others to do the care work, it has become increasingly possible to measure the substantial monetary value of this work.<sup>420</sup> It is estimated that the unpaid care economy would represent between 15 to over 50 percent of national Gross Domestic Products if it was counted in national accounts.<sup>421</sup> Using another measure, unpaid care work has been calculated to be equivalent to about 182 percent of total government tax revenue in India.<sup>422</sup>

Measuring and recognising women's time poverty and actual contribution to the economy will help to improve policy making.<sup>423</sup> For example, employment schemes will fail if they ignore women's care constraints and attempts to involve women in politics will be unsuccessful if they ignore the pressures of child-care. Some advances have already been made,<sup>424</sup> but more work is needed to develop time-use surveys and statistics that could measure this kind of work in order to inform policymaking.<sup>425</sup> A change in society is needed so that the centrality of the provision of care is recognised and valued above the pursuit of economic growth.<sup>426</sup>

Recognition is also needed of those who provide care, but are frequently excluded from economic, political and natural resource management decisions that affect their daily lives. This will include tackling the practical constraints to political participation, and building their capacity and agency to participate (see Part two: Section 4 on Political participation).

**Steps must be taken to recognise the value of unpaid care work as a crucial social and economic resource, including by measuring it and counting it as a form of work. Those who provide unpaid care work should be supported, valued and treated as rights-holders.**<sup>427</sup>

## Caring as 'women's work'

Discriminatory gender stereotypes related to care and work, such as casting men as breadwinners and women as carers and nurturers, are pervasive in and across every society, and continue even where women are engaged in paid work.<sup>428</sup> The negative connotations associated with care as 'women's work' construe women as second-class citizens whose place is in the home.<sup>429</sup> Challenging these stereotypes can be met with emotional, psychological, verbal, physical and sexual VAWG.<sup>430</sup>

These social norms run deep, but are not immutable. A research project by ActionAid found that change starts with women themselves, who may not recognise what contribution they make or value it fully. Collective meetings can then prove valuable both to identify priorities such as water collection or child care, and to start to change

men's attitudes.<sup>431</sup> However, change will take time. A recent study found that even where men and boys started to take on more work caring for people, they still considered household duties demeaning.<sup>432</sup>

**Actively tackling these social norms is key to the redistribution of care work within households and society.<sup>433</sup> Programmes which support women's own recognition of the value of their work as well as encouraging men and boys to provide care; education which promotes the value of care work such as in school curricula; and incentives/legislation to encourage employers to offer flexible work time and adequate family leave for men and women, can all help to redefine gendered stereotypes and ensure the care burden is more evenly shared.<sup>434</sup>**

## **Governments' responsibility to care**

The role of governments in accepting responsibility for the provision of care is crucial. Neo-liberal policies, starting with donor-led structural adjustment programmes and particularly apparent in austerity measures, have relied heavily on women's unpaid time to meet the shortfalls caused by cuts in public services and privatisation (see Part two: Section 6 on WEE).<sup>435</sup> It is left to women to fill the caring gap and the workload of poor households intensifies while, at the same time, families have less income due to unemployment and welfare cuts.<sup>436</sup>

Improving the accessibility and quality of public services will provide women with increased time for employment, education, and participation in social, cultural and political life as well as improving the quality of care that is provided.<sup>437</sup> Ensuring universal provision of social protection will also reduce the demand for unpaid care, while changes to the tax system can ensure that it does not reinforce women's unpaid care role.<sup>438</sup>

**Governments should have a duty to ensure that high quality, affordable care is available for all children, the elderly, people with disabilities and those who are sick. Provision of these services benefits both the potential carer by reducing their time burden, and the recipient who is able to access high quality services. This requires government commitment to fully-funded, high quality, public services, and to raising sufficient resources through progressive taxation. Some families may make the choice to do some of this care themselves, but this should be a real choice, with sufficient public provision to ensure access to all.**

## **Reducing the burden**

The low status accorded to care work has also resulted in a lack of investment in the technology and infrastructure that could reduce the time taken to perform these tasks. Simple technology, such as grain grinders and fuel-efficient stoves, can make a major

difference to women's time burdens.<sup>439</sup> Inadequate provision of key infrastructure such as energy, water and sanitation facilities by governments has a disproportionate impact on poor women and girls, particularly those living in rural areas, who spend significant amounts of time collecting water and fuel such as firewood.

**Governments should ensure sufficient investment in key infrastructure provision and in affordable domestic technologies.**

## 7.4 Recommendations

International institutions/governments should:<sup>440</sup>

1. Measure the extent and nature of unpaid care and recognise its essential social and economic contribution.
2. Acknowledge governments' responsibility for the provision of high quality accessible care for all, supported by the necessary progressive revenue-raising and expenditure.
3. Work towards a change in social norms to shift responsibility for the provision of care from families to the state and from women and girls to men and boys, and to increase the value and recognition given to care work
4. Use a care-lens in all relevant public policy making and donor programming, including taxation and expenditure, social protection and decent work.
5. Invest in appropriate labour-saving technology and infrastructure.
6. Tackle the barriers that prevent those who provide care from having a greater voice in decision making.

## 8. Social Norms

*"You must allow the community to decide for themselves rather than condemning...It [FGM] doesn't stop when they [the community] superficially raise their hands, or when religious leaders say 'we declare it will stop'...It has to come from inside the community. It has to be discussed over and over again, in the African tradition. That's how change comes."*

Bogaletch Gebre, Co-founder of KMG-Ethiopia<sup>441</sup>

### 8.1 The Issues

Throughout Part two of this report, the influence of discriminatory social norms - widely shared beliefs and practices often codified in formal and informal laws - is evident in every aspect of women's and girls' lives. Low priority in education; child and early forced marriage; occupational segregation; exclusion from household, community, national and international decision making; responsibility for unpaid care work, and the widespread acceptance of Violence against women and girls (VAWG) are all ways in which discriminatory social norms adversely impact on women's and girls' choices and chances.<sup>442</sup>

All societies have strong gender norms that describe how women and men are expected to behave and what it means to be a woman or man.<sup>443</sup> Where these are discriminatory, they have a profound impact in perpetuating gender inequality and are a major reason why more progress has not been made in the last two decades. Discriminatory social norms can result in gender-biased legislation, laws not being enforced, programme interventions failing and continuing discrimination against women and girls.<sup>444</sup> The practice of dowry in India, for example, is now illegal but is so embedded in local custom that families continue to comply.<sup>445</sup> Religion often underpins the customs and traditions that limit the rights of women and girls, as evidenced by research on discriminatory social norms in relation to VAWG in Bangladesh, Egypt and Pakistan.<sup>446</sup>

It will simply not be possible to tackle the structural barriers to gender equality unless deeply entrenched social norms are transformed.

**‘Social norms** are the informal and formal laws, beliefs and practices that help to determine collective understanding of what are acceptable attitudes and behaviours. As such, they can either drive processes of social change or act as brakes and barriers to such processes’<sup>447</sup>

Failure to comply with dominant norms can trigger strong social sanctions, such as ridiculing, ostracising or even violence, or less visible punishments such as exclusion from employment opportunities or marriage. People also self-regulate their own behaviour in order to conform to what they think is expected of them by others.<sup>448</sup>

## 8.2 What’s happened in the last 20 years?

### Changes in some areas

Greater international attention and specific targeting of community attitudes and behaviour has led to a gradual change in discriminatory social norms in some areas. For example, there has been a gradual shift in attitudes and behaviour on girls’ education,<sup>449</sup> and some evidence of a shift towards expecting girls to marry later and have fewer children.<sup>450</sup>

### Entrenched norms in others

However, many more social norms have remained consistent over the last two decades. Almost everywhere men are still seen as the primary income earners or ‘breadwinners,’ and the main decision makers.<sup>451</sup> Meanwhile, women are expected to be obedient and caring<sup>452</sup> and to do the majority of unpaid care work and household duties<sup>453</sup> (see Part two: Section 7 on Care). Discriminatory norms around ‘women’s work’ continue to entrench occupational segregation in the workplace, even when new employment opportunities arise, leading to the concentration of women in low paid and vulnerable employment.<sup>454</sup> Significantly, the expectation that women will work on family

land without payment, access to profits, property ownership or inheritance rights continues in many countries.<sup>455</sup>

Menstruation is a taboo subject in many societies, creating stigma and negative connotations for women which can affect their self-esteem and ability to participate in public life. Lack of facilities for menstrual hygiene management is one reason why adolescent girls do not attend school. Tackling the social norms around menstrual hygiene can have positive effects, and lead to improvements in the provision of sanitary facilities.<sup>456</sup>

Social norms also act as a barrier to eliminating VAWG (see Part two: Section 2 on VAWG). There is growing evidence that beliefs around male authority and a man's right to sex, internalised by men and enforced through peer pressure and other social institutions such as the media or sporting clubs, increase the likelihood that individual men will engage in sexual violence.<sup>457</sup> Research has found that both partner violence and non-partner rape are fundamentally related to unequal gender norms, power inequalities and dominant ideals of manhood that support violence and control over women.<sup>458</sup>

### Gender norms and the media

Global communications have an extensive and increasing impact on what is considered acceptable in relation to notions of femininity and masculinity. Press coverage and advertising contributes to discriminatory social norms when it does not provide a balanced picture of women's diverse experiences and skills, reinforces gender stereotypes or contains violent or degrading images.<sup>459</sup>

Moreover new communication technologies can facilitate direct threats, harassment and the widespread distribution of violent and misogynistic language and imagery (see Part two: Section 2 on VAWG).

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) calls on Governments to:

- Increase women's participation in and access to expression and decision making in and through the media and new communication technologies (J.1).
- Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in media (J.2).<sup>460</sup>

One of the key strategies for bringing about greater gender balance amongst media staff and sensitivity in the news is to develop ethical guidelines, gender policies and affirmative action targets. Gender Links has worked with activists and newsrooms across Southern Africa to persuade media organisations to develop such policies and targets.<sup>461</sup>

The media can also be a force for progressive change. Social media, such as twitter and Facebook, can play a vital role linking local and national actions, as with global campaigns such as the 16 Days of Activism to End VAWG.<sup>462</sup>

### Increased interest and research by donors

The concept of social norms is not new, Article 5 of UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) requires countries to address and change social and cultural patterns that reinforce the stereotyping of women and traditional gender roles, or that promote the relative superiority or inferiority of either of the sexes.<sup>463</sup> However mainstream recognition of the role of norms in undermining attempts at gender equality is relatively recent, but now sufficiently established for the World Bank to produce a report Voice and Agency which examines the impact of social norms on women's empowerment.<sup>464</sup> A wealth of data is also emerging as a result of initiatives such as the OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index.<sup>465</sup> Tackling discriminatory social norms was also prioritised in the draft conclusions for the 58th UN Commission on the Status of Women and in discussions among the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>466</sup>

### Working with men and boys

The women's movement has long recognised the need to engage with men and boys as allies and as targets in attitudinal and behavioural change education in order to achieve transformative change for women. Recently there has been an increased focus on this area of work, along with work to improve the lives of men and boys who are negatively affected by gender norms. Although seen as potentially valuable, there are also concerns<sup>467</sup> that it is being taken out of context with other gender equality work, and may lead to a diversion of funding and political support away from women's empowerment, when women's rights organisations are already chronically underfunded. There is also a deeper concern that the new focus on men and boys has in some cases seen a move towards men as leaders in gender equality initiatives, including gender-based violence (GBV), with an associated risk that women and girls will remain or be kept silent in debates around their rights.<sup>468</sup> There is even a fear that it will legitimise the strengthening of men's rights organisations seeking to undermine gender equality (See Part two: Section 2 on VAWG).

### 8.3 Challenges and ways forward

Changing discriminatory social norms requires action in a number of areas. Recognition of the interplay between each of the factors below is crucial, as is acknowledgement of the power relationships which underpin prevailing norms; success is likely to require challenging the notion that discriminatory social norms are 'cultural' and therefore acceptable or immutable.

### Working with communities

Social norms are frequently deeply entrenched in the traditions and customs of a community. It is increasingly clear that neither legal reform, nor changing the attitudes of individuals, is enough and that the most effective way to bring about behavioural change is to alter perceptions in community standards.<sup>469</sup> It appears that a critical mass

of opinion is necessary before people are prepared to risk challenging social norms by changing their behaviour, so that what was previously unacceptable becomes normal.<sup>470</sup> Persuading those influential groups that currently hold power such as community leaders, traditional rulers and religious leaders, or creating community champions can be an effective way towards creating this critical mass,<sup>471</sup> provided that this forms part of a comprehensive approach which prioritises the empowerment of women and girls.

Women's rights organisations and other progressive social movements have been challenging traditional orthodoxies for decades. In Ethiopia, the women's rights organisation Kembatta Mentti Gezzima (KMG) has successfully worked with traditional leaders, law enforcers, parents and girls to create mutually reinforcing pressure against the practice of FGM.<sup>472</sup> Working with, and learning from these organisations should be a central part of the efforts to change community norms.<sup>473</sup>

**Interventions to promote gender equality must include long-term work to challenge discriminatory social norms, including working with faith-based and other local leaders.**

### Empowering women themselves

Even when new attitudes about women's rights and status are introduced into a community, this does not mean that women themselves will embrace these ideas. The power, for example, of the extended family and local 'gossip' can be extensive, making it extremely difficult for women and girls to go against social norms and change their behaviour. Women and girls may not see themselves as having any choice to act differently or may have internalised social norms to such an extent that they do not recognise violations of their rights.<sup>474</sup> For example, a woman may not report rape not only because she will be shunned by her community, but also because she considers herself to blame.

In contexts where women and girls have always been without influence, it takes time, patience and mentoring to build confidence so that they see themselves as having the power to make choices and to act on them.<sup>475</sup> This building of 'agency' will be most effective if it is combined with other interventions to increase women's empowerment and status in the community such as through education or employment opportunities.<sup>476</sup>

**Challenging social norms should start by supporting women and girls to build their agency and autonomy.**

## Government policies and laws

While not enough on their own, legislation and policies can contribute to changes in perceptions and therefore social norms. For example, laws around flexible working for parents can influence attitudes on who does the child care or reform of inheritance laws can generate awareness that women are entitled to inherit property and land on an equal basis with men. However these measures will not be successful unless they are enforced by public authorities with adequate funding and a clear mandate to investigate whether informal laws, norms and practices are impeding implementation.<sup>477</sup> In countries where multiple legal systems operate, such as customary or sharia law, addressing gender discrimination in these and removing anomalies between legal frameworks needs to be addressed.

Moreover government and national institutions, such as the police and media, have a major role to play in perpetuating discriminatory social norms and their regulation will be part of any solution.

**Formal and informal laws can support the development of new social norms and should be enforced and implemented fully, including the regulation of national institutions such as the media and justice system.**

## Investing in measurement

Interventions are most likely to be prioritised by governments and donors when success can be measured. Indicators on social norm change were not included in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), partly because they were seen to be unquantifiable. However, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in available data, together with methods for measuring change, including demographic and health surveys, attitudinal surveys and gender elements within household and labour-force surveys.<sup>478</sup> In addition, the OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) provides data on discriminatory social norms and institutions in over 160 countries.<sup>479</sup> A report from ODI and OECD shows how existing data could be used to measure changes in practice, attitudes and empowerment. The challenge to governments and the international community is to invest in collecting this data, and to use it to develop new indicators.<sup>480</sup>

**Developing and using data and indicators in the measurement of social norms change should be a political priority and receive increased funding. The possibility of measuring social norm change should be acknowledged and corresponding indicators should be used by donors and in international frameworks.**

## **8.4 Recommendations**

International institutions/governments should:

1. Challenge discriminatory social norms by, in the first instance, supporting women and girls to build their agency and seek solutions through collective agency and movement building.
2. Work with whole communities and community leaders to challenge discriminatory social norms and identify champions.
3. Provide financial and political support to women's rights organisations that have a track-record in challenging discriminatory social norms.
4. Invest in collecting data on social norm change and developing new indicators to measure progress.

# Part three: The way forward

## 1. Emerging solutions

In Part two of this report, we outline the changes needed in specific issue areas, and point to the wealth of detailed literature on what should be done differently. A number of cross-cutting themes emerge. Most are relevant for international organisations, donors, national governments, CSOs and private sector actors.

Essential to these approaches is a re-framing of work on gender equality towards an approach that recognises women's and girls' rights, their role as agents of change, and the unequal power relations between women and men that undermine gender equality. The first set of proposals therefore address cross-cutting structural barriers including working directly with marginalised women, supporting women's rights organisations, promoting positive social norms, and reassessing macro-economic policies including the care economy.

Equally important is the provision of the necessary resources and political will to achieve these transformative changes. The second set of proposals considers how to create political will, hold governments to account and leverage good quality resources, while, at the same time, recognising the ever-present threat of opposition and backlash.

## 2. Tackling underlying causes

*“A broader transformative model that addresses the structural constraints that women face in their everyday lives is the most effective framework for women's empowerment in the long-term.”*

Pathways of Empowerment Research Consortium, Institute of Development Studies<sup>481</sup>

Women and girls are disadvantaged not because they are a 'vulnerable group' but because society is structured by unequal power relations that create barriers to equality.<sup>482</sup> These multiple barriers permeate the fabric of society and impede progress to tackle gender inequality and violations of women's and girls' rights. A focus on the immediate problems of individual women or girls will ultimately fail if these barriers are not tackled, and if women and girls are not empowered.

### 2.1 Structural barriers to gender equality and the achievement of women's and girls' rights

While women and girls will face different barriers depending on their local context and the intersectionality of different discriminations, there are strong similarities across societies. In many contexts, legal discrimination (both formal and informal) remains, such as in relation to inheritance rights for women or sexual rights. In other instances, laws and regulations are not enforced, as with VAWG, or export processing zones that waive labour regulations to attract transnationals. Across the board, there has been

insufficient political will by governments who have devoted too little resources to this issue – whether this is the absence of affirmative action in employment, reliance on women’s unpaid care services to supplement public services or failing to ensure that public institutions and services are responsive to the needs of women and girls. At the same time, there is a lack of support by governments and donors for women’s rights organisations and movements.

### **Structural barriers to gender equality:**

- Women and girls lack sufficient autonomy and agency
- Women and girls lack bodily integrity, including freedom from violence and reproductive rights
- Women’s rights organisations are under-resourced
- Women and girls are excluded from decision making
- Institutions are discriminatory, unaccountable and lack expertise in gender equality
- Laws and government policies are discriminatory or fail to recognise the different needs of women and men
- Discriminatory social norms perpetuate and condone gender inequality
- Women and girls have less access to and control over resources than men and boys
- Public services are inadequate to address gender equality
- Macro-economic policies create and perpetuate gender inequality

Action and funding is needed in all the above areas, but there are four aspects that we argue particularly require more attention, and are explored in more detail below.

**Interventions to promote gender equality and women’s rights must tackle the structural barriers across political, economic and social spheres, addressing power imbalances between women and men.**

## **2.2 Women and girls controlling their own lives**

Women’s and girls’ social, economic and political empowerment entails not just access to more resources and power, but also the ability take advantage of these opportunities and make and act on choices (agency) in order to control their own lives.<sup>483</sup> Working directly with marginalised women and girls, allowing them to identify their own priorities and solutions, requires a move away from perceiving women and girls as simply a ‘vulnerable group’, to active citizens who should be part of decision making processes (see Part two: Section 4 on Political participation and Part two: Section 1 on WPS).

Women are not a homogenous group, each woman will experience discrimination differently due to the ways in which gender inequality intersects with other inequalities such as poverty level, race, ethnicity, disability, caste, age and sexuality. Interventions

should therefore specifically address the needs and multiple discriminations of marginalised women including disabled, rural, indigenous, elderly, ethnic minority and widowed women.<sup>484</sup>

**Governments and donors, including INGOs, must emphasise the importance of working with marginalised women to build agency and collective action.<sup>485</sup> All women should be able to engage in making the decisions that affect their lives.<sup>486</sup> Interventions must also take into account how gender inequality intersects with other inequalities such as race, ethnicity, disability, caste, age and sexuality or marital status (including widows) to further marginalise particular groups of women.**

### **2.3 Women’s rights organisations as drivers of change**

*“Women-led organisations have opened spaces for women and girls from diverse backgrounds and situations to meet, to learn, to strategise, to speak for and represent themselves. Women-led organisations take a rounded view of the rights and lives of women and girls, linking personal to political, micro issues to macro matters, and advocating for practical, policy and structural changes.”*

Helen O’Connell for Comic Relief<sup>487</sup>

There are many organisations which work with marginalised women to successfully promote women’s rights and gender equality and who should be supported and funded. However, there is a specific and vital role for organisations that have a primary focus on promoting women’s rights, gender equality and/or empowerment and are specifically led by women for women.<sup>488</sup> These organisations are particularly well-equipped to work with marginalised women and girls to build their capacity and agency, allowing them to speak for themselves and to take collective action.

Further, women’s collective action, as part of an organised movement, is critical for creating change. Some of the most important advances in women’s and girls’ rights have been secured through the efforts of women’s movements, such as the BPfA, Security Council Resolution 1325 and UN Women; legal reforms in countries that introduce and expand women’s and girls’ rights; and demand the increased representation of women in public and private sectors.<sup>489</sup> Research in 70 countries across four decades found that the mobilisation of women’s organisations and movements is more important for tackling VAWG than a nation’s income, left-wing political parties, or the representation of women in politics.<sup>490</sup> Similarly, research carried out in five fragile and conflict-affected countries demonstrated that women’s rights organisations at the grassroots level play a crucial role in mitigating conflict and building peace.<sup>491</sup> Women’s rights organisations and other organisations working with marginalised women also have a crucial role to play in creating political will and holding governments to account through their advocacy and activism.<sup>492</sup>

Donor recognition, political support and funding for these organisations remains insufficient. Many women's rights organisations are small with limited fundraising capacity, contacts and access to funding. A survey by AWID found that a third of such organisations sampled experienced a significant budget shortfall, facing the threat of closure.<sup>493</sup> Those that do receive grants frequently struggle to meet compliance demands.<sup>494</sup> Guidelines from the OECD DAC Network for Gender Equality recommends that evaluation and reporting requirements for grants to women's organisations should be flexible and not time intensive.<sup>495</sup> Long-term funding is particularly important for work that challenges structural inequalities, yet over half of women's organisations surveyed by AWID had never received multi-year funding.<sup>496</sup> Moreover, many donors also continue to prefer to fund service delivery rather than transformative approaches.<sup>497</sup>

**Women's rights organisations and organisations working with marginalised women play a core role in bringing about transformative changes through service delivery, building women's agency, and holding governments to account and creating political will. Given their catalytic role, donors should be providing far greater political and financial support to women's rights organisations. Donors should support work towards transformative change that goes beyond service delivery, and be prepared to provide core funding.**

## **2.4 Social norms**

Discriminatory social norms permeate every aspect of gender inequality and are a major reason why more progress has not been made in the last two decades (See Part two: Section 8 on Social Norms). Social norms, which include values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and practices widely held in societies, assign women subordinate status in the home and community and so legitimise and perpetuate inequality at all levels. Widely held views of, for example, men as dominant 'breadwinners' and women as 'carers' perpetuates unequal power relations between women and men, which are then further reproduced by institutions such as the police, military, education systems, and the media.<sup>498</sup>

Donor recognition of the role of discriminatory social norms in undermining attempts at gender equality is relatively recent, as in the recent World Bank report on Voice and Agency<sup>499</sup> and has been particularly driven by the increased focus on adolescent girls and on Violence against Women and Girls in development discourse.<sup>500</sup>

**Positive social norms should be promoted by: supporting women and girls to build their agency; working with whole communities and community leaders to challenge discriminatory social norms and identify champions; providing financial and political support to women's rights organisations that have a track-record in challenging discriminatory social norms; and investment in collecting data on social norm change and developing new indicators to measure progress.**

## 2.5 Contradictions between macro-economic policies and gender equality

*“Running through the commitments that governments made at Beijing and Copenhagen<sup>501</sup> is a paradox: the commitments reflect an expectation that governments are responsible for implementing policies to improve the well-being of women, especially poor women, but they do not effectively address the ways in which market liberalization and privatization may undermine the capacity of governments to discharge these responsibilities, especially to poor women”.*

Diane Elson, Progress of the World’s Women (2000), UNIFEM.<sup>502</sup>

The inconsistency between commitments on gender equality and continued neo-liberal policies on economic growth has had a significant impact on progress. While in the immediate years after Beijing many of the major donors were social progressives, with some progress on reproductive health for example, they remained firmly committed to neo-liberal economics. Regressive taxation, cuts in public services, privatisation and deregulation all take their toll alongside the impact of austerity measures which fall disproportionately on women.<sup>503</sup> The impact of these policies goes well beyond women’s economic rights, impacting across all aspects of women’s lives (see Part two: Section 6 on WEE).

Failure to acknowledge the importance of the care economy has been a major omission. Fifteen years ago, the United Nation’s first Progress on the World’s Women report recognised that the current way of understanding economics was incompatible with achieving gender justice, largely because it ignored women’s unpaid work in the household.<sup>504</sup> As a result, the transfer of costs from the public sector (where they are monetised) to the household (where they are not) hid the costs of economic restructuring (See Part two: Section 7 on Care).

**Greater recognition is needed of the adverse effect of current macro-economic policies on gender equality. The development of alternative policies, including fiscal, trade and investment, should explicitly acknowledge governments’ duty to promote gender equality. Existing inequalities in intra-household decision making, unequal access to resources and employment between men and women, and the importance of the care economy and women’s role within it, should all be explicitly recognised in policy making.**

## 3. Resources, accountability and political will

*“Too often, policy gains, rather than real impact, has been our indicator of success. This must change. We must take stock, and ensure that plans are action-oriented and adequately funded. Simply put, we need more results for women and girls.”*

UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, (2014)<sup>505</sup>

Creating sustainable and transformative progress towards gender equality will require mobilisation of resources, robust accountability mechanisms and the inclusion of women in decision making processes. Above all, it will require greater political will to implement existing commitments and to put into action what we now know works to empower women and girls.

### **3.1 Political will**

Underlying the lack of success must ultimately be an absence of sufficient political will to bring about fundamental change. While there has been increased political priority given to gender equality over the last two decades, expressed both in rhetoric and written commitments, there has been insufficient political will to translate these commitments into long-term transformative change for women and girls.

**Creating and sustaining genuine political will to promote transformative change, among donors, governments, the private sector, CSOs and communities, is essential to achieving gender equality and the rights of women and girls.**

### **3.2. Women in decision making**

As was shown in Part two, women remain excluded from political and economic decision making at every level, from household to global. This is particularly true at the international level. In 2014, 58 world leaders represented five billion people at the G20 and other global summits; only five were women.<sup>506</sup> Women made up only a quarter of members of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) governing bodies at the recent COP20 climate change negotiations in Lima.<sup>507</sup> While the presence of women in negotiations does not necessarily increase the priority given to gender equality, it can help, particularly if there is a critical mass.

**Ensuring and supporting the participation and real influence of women in decision making is not only just but will also increase political will to promote gender equality.**

### **3.3 Strong accountability mechanisms**

The failure to turn rhetoric into reality is due in part to the lack of mechanisms to hold governments to account on their commitments.<sup>508</sup> Governments should have clear responsibility for implementing international and national commitments, involving all ministries and agencies (not only national women's machineries) and provide civil society with the access and information needed to hold them to account.<sup>509</sup> For example, all governments should report against the post-Busan global indicator on gender equality; one of 10 indicators used to monitor implementation of the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation which provides data on whether governments track allocations for gender equality and how this information is made available.<sup>510</sup>

CSOs can use tools such as gender-responsive budgeting to monitor government planning, programming and budgeting to ensure it contributes to the advancement of gender equality.<sup>511</sup>

**Strong accountability mechanisms are needed to ensure donors and governments are held to account in implementing their commitments on gender equality and women's and girls' rights.**

### 3.4 Investment in data collection

Data is a vital tool in holding governments to account. Gaps in data collection and a lack of sex-disaggregated data are critical barriers for accountability. Robust data is also essential for good policy analysis and in setting priorities given that what is measured is invested in. Deciding what and how to measure progress is itself a political decision and too often women and their priorities are systematically excluded from data collection.<sup>512</sup>

While the need to disaggregate data by sex, and other factors, is widely recognised,<sup>513</sup> significant gaps in sex and age-disaggregated data remain, compounded by a lack of funding and the weak capacity of national statistical agencies.<sup>514</sup> There are particular gaps in relation to measuring social norm change, poverty, time use, VAWG, and the environment.<sup>515</sup> The use of qualitative data and perception indicators is also particularly important for gender-sensitive data and data that capture women's priorities.<sup>516</sup> There is a particular lack of data on older women, for example population-based surveys commonly collect data for people aged 15-49. In the few cases where it is collected for people aged over 50 data is often not disaggregated by sex.<sup>517</sup> This lack of data on older women means that states are not being held accountable for all women, and it is difficult to design interventions which address their specific needs.<sup>518</sup>

**Investment in data collection is necessary both to hold governments to account and to inform good policy making, this should include sex and age-disaggregated data.**

### 3.5 Gender mainstreaming and standalone interventions

There is growing consensus, for example in the context of debates around the post-2015 framework, that the most effective way to achieve change is a combination of both gender mainstreaming and standalone dedicated targets, programmes and funding to achieve change on the ground. Standalone projects focus specifically on promoting gender equality so can be useful in fast-tracking change on priority issues. Gender mainstreaming, launched at the Beijing conference, seeks to ensure that development organisations and institutions take gender equality and women's and girls' rights into account in all policy and spending decisions, as well as directing resources towards, and consulting with, women and girls.<sup>519</sup> This may take more time, but will embed any changes more deeply into the work of institutions. This combination of approaches has been widely recognised in the run up to the post-2015 negotiations,

such as in The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.<sup>520</sup> Yet so far, limited progress has been made in ensuring its implementation.

**A combination of gender mainstreaming and standalone interventions is the best way to provide the necessary technical expertise, while also leveraging the required resources and political will.**

### **3.6 International agreements – with transformative targets and indicators**

The international agenda can make a difference. For example, the new post-2015 framework can build on the success of MDG 3 in galvanising political will and mobilising resources, but then ensure impact by developing transformative targets and indicators which tackle the structural causes of inequality (see Part two introductory section). In Achieving Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in the Post-2015 Framework, GADN has proposed how the framework could be developed.<sup>521</sup> Proposals for the inclusion of women, peace and security in the framework are discussed by SaferWorld in Gender, violence and peace: a post-2015 development agenda.<sup>522</sup> Proposals on SRHR include IPPF’s Vision 2020<sup>523</sup> and the International HIV and AIDS Alliance, STOP AIDS NOW! and Stop AIDS Alliance’s joint report on meeting the needs of the most marginalised and excluded.<sup>524</sup>

**International agreements and frameworks should explicitly address gender equality, with transformative targets and indicators, as well as mainstreaming gender analysis throughout agreed documents.**

### **3.7 National Development Plans**

Governments have an important role to play, and should ensure that measures to promote gender equality and women’s and girls’ rights are explicitly addressed across all national development plans, not just within women’s ministries. Public expenditure should contribute to promoting gender equality, and at the very least should benefit women and men equally. For example, public investments in infrastructure and technology can reduce women’s unpaid care, and access to public services including health and education can reduce gender inequality.<sup>525</sup> Gender budgeting can support this process. Legislation, regulation and affirmative action measures may all be needed to support gender equality targets.

**States should prioritise the promotion of gender equality within their national development plans with sufficient public expenditure, gender-sensitive policy making, supportive legislation and affirmative action and regulation where needed.**

### **3.8 Resources**

Political will must be supported by adequate resources. Financial support is needed across all areas of gender equality whether this be investment in gender-responsive

public services, the provision of adequate social protection, programmes supporting survivors of violence against women and girls, increased training and sensitisation at all levels of the judicial system, awareness and educational programmes to shift social norms or the development of positive action programmes to support women in participating in decision making in public life. In Part one it was argued that resources for gender equality were not only insufficient, but were also not fit for purpose, partly as a result of the privatisation of aid and the focus on short-term, results-driven donor assistance.<sup>526</sup>

**Donors should provide increased levels of long-term flexible funding for gender equality. New aid modalities should be reviewed to ensure that they do not mitigate against funding for gender equality.**

### **3.9 Opposition and backlash**

Opposition to the advancement of women's and girls' rights is deeply entrenched, with alliances emerging and changing. Since the 1990s, the Vatican has been aligning with Islamic fundamentalist and other states regressive on women's and girls' rights issues to threaten progressive agreements on gender equality within the UN system.<sup>527</sup> In 2012, the UN Commission on the Status of Women closed without a resolution for the first time due to conservative forces challenging internationally accepted women's rights language.<sup>528</sup> Issues such as abortion and sexual and reproductive health and rights also give rise to deep divisions among governments, for example, the Rio+20 UN Summit saw a backlash against women's reproductive rights.<sup>529</sup> As advances in women's rights are made we have also seen increasing opposition<sup>530</sup> from organisations purporting to promote the rights of men and boys. Although small, these groups are often vociferous.

Opposition and backlash can also take the form of intimidation. Women's rights activists in every region are facing fundamentalist tendencies within the world's major and minor religions, frequently accompanied by harassment and sexual violence.<sup>531</sup> New forms of oppression through social media are also being used against those who advocate for gender equality.

**Space for gender equality on political agendas should be staunchly defended, the hard-won gains to date protected, and the safety of those defending women's and girls' rights secured.**

## 4. 2015 and beyond

As we mark the 20-year milestone since the BPfA, the fifteenth anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and approach the challenges of implementing a new post-2015 agenda, the greatest challenge now is to move beyond the rhetoric. In every area covered in Part two of the report we have seen sometimes substantial recognition of the issues by influential development actors. However, in almost every area there has been a corresponding lack of action, and of real change in women's and girls' lives. 20 years ago at the Beijing Conference, governments accepted responsibility for ending violations of women's rights and progressing gender equality, but most have shied away from making the fundamental changes which are really needed.

We can be encouraged though by the evidence and knowledge now available on what needs to be done, and by the women's movement that is now stronger than ever. Organisations and networks worldwide are marking the anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action with calls for their governments to account for the commitments made 20 years ago to advance gender equality and the rights of women and girls. These calls for action provide inspiration, and outline recommendations that must be acted upon by international, national and civil society actors well beyond the twentieth anniversary of the landmark conference.<sup>532</sup>

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