

ADOLESCENT GIRLS

The international focus in April was on the Adolescent Girl. UNESCO held a conference on girls in New York from April 26-28, 2010. The three major themes were Gender Equality, Empowerment and Economic Growth. Adolescent girls, due to age and gender, tend to get overlooked in the discussions about changing the perceptions and roles of women. Many of them face discrimination before they are even born, which is proven in the fact that over 1,000,000 girls are missing. They are less likely to go to school, more subject to violence, more likely to be “owned” by their fathers and male relatives, more subject to AIDS/HIV and less likely to have economic opportunity. Due to the discrimination against girls, 6 of the 8 Millennium Development Goals are in grave danger of not being met. These are: reduce by half the number of people living on less than \$.50 per day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger; all children have a full primary schooling by 2015; ensure gender parity in primary and secondary schooling by 2015; reduce infant mortality by 2/3 by 2015; reduce by 3/4 the maternal mortality rate by 2015; halt and reverse the spread of HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases by 2015.

While much research needs to be done on girls, one clear factor is the predominance of violence that runs through all discussions. There are 3 types of violence: family, which might demand state interference; harmful practices; and sexual violence, including neglect and forced prostitution. While poverty is a major factor, lack of economic and educational opportunities feed this violence.

UNESCO has an 8 point action plan that could change this situation. The action points are: listen to girls and let them participate; invest in girls and young women; change and enforce the law; change attitudes of men and boys; develop a safety net for the poorest and most vulnerable girls and their families; get specific data on girls; take a life cycle approach from before birth through senior's maturity; and learn and document information and statistics so that research can be improved.

Major problems are facing our world, including demographic transitions, the global economic crisis, climate change and technology. The youth population has become a demographic bulge. Girls need to be able to take part in the opportunities and give their knowledge to finding solutions, not to just being part of the challenge.