It is a story of two steps forward and one step back. Many will take heart from the progress made towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals, which most relate to the lives of women and girls, especially in the arena of childhood survival, and access to school. But the delivery of a world where women are fundamental equals is still some way off. In all of their life is still a long way off, so what can be done to accelerate the delivery of this basic human right?

Cultural norms and ingrained traditions lie at the heart of gender inequality, against which newly ratified laws and agreed international conventions shrivel when confronted by their historical intensity. The idea that women are subordinate to men, and that men and women have completely different roles and responsibilities in life, has become engrained in many societies. Thus the sense of how they are ‘supposed’ to behave is often picked up by girls and boys in childhood and reinforced throughout their lives via parents, the local community, at school, in the media and through religious institutions.

As Plan International’s new report ‘Pathways to Power: Creating Sustainable Change for Adolescent Girls’ indicates, the impact of this ingrained sexism is multi-fold and long-term for women around the world, and most damaging for those in the global south. In poor countries girls are disproportionately accepting the price tag of a marriage dowry. They are given no choice in the matter. They are sent to develop ambitious gender inequality. But whatever the solutions, they need to start early. We need to work with girls to build their knowledge, capacity and decision making powers in the community. If girls are to challenge the ways that they are ‘supposed’ to behave, and stop such ideas being endlessly reproduced through the generations, they need support from parents, the community and the state itself.

Of course, we must also tackle poverty if we are to address cultural norms such as child marriage. To eradicate poverty is to eradicate the need for families to sell their daughters to survive. We have to convince families to break the self fulfilling cycle and persuade them that acquiring an education and skills will pay off in the longer term. We must work with families and communities to transform attitudes and values, but we must also work on implementing high-level laws and policies which support and protect girls. Laws are an essential first step in grounding gender-based violence as a crime, and sending powerful messages that discrimination is not acceptable. Laws can help girls achieve their right to an education, and help them escape domestic sexual violence. If we can help girls and women gain an education and find financial independence, there are game-changing opportunities which can lift families and children out of poverty for generations.

Educated girls will make a success of their families, communities and wider society. Educated girls will make a success of their families, communities and wider society – their potential is tremendous. These are facts that are not lost on girls who know such attitudes cannot be tolerated in a world which respects women and girls and wants to maximise the enriching contributions they make to all our lives.

It is a story of two steps forward and one step back. Many will take heart from the progress made towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals, which most relate to the lives of women and girls, especially in the arena of childhood survival, and access to school. But the delivery of a world where women are fundamental equals is still some way off. In all of their life is still a long way off, so what can be done to accelerate the delivery of this basic human right?

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Gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment are vital to any society that aspires to be truly equal and democratic.

**FERNANDO FRUTUOSO DE MELO**
Director General of Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid, European Commission

*We've come a long way down the path towards gender equality.* The gender education gap is closing slowly; in a third of developing countries there are more girls in school than boys. Health indicators like female life expectancy at birth are improving. And there are more women on the labour market, helping boost women's social standing in many countries. And yet no country can claim to have achieved genuine gender equality.

The sad fact is that women too often face lifelong discrimination, which affects their access to education, decent work, social protection, inheritance, economic assets, productive resources and decision-making processes. Loss is invested in educating girls, many of whom are kept out of school. Most women are trapped in vulnerable jobs with no escape from poverty. Even those in paid work all too frequently in lower status, gender-insure jobs with poor promotion prospects and gender discrimination at the workplace. Moreover, business start-ups are not always an option – especially when inheritance rights, property ownership and access to credit are hard to come by.

This is not the way out of poverty – or of poverty perpetuity. Instead, it is a need to give women the meaningful job opportunities they need to fully contribute to wealth creation as productive members of society.

When women can participate as equals in economic life the benefits are felt by them, their families and their communities too. We must understand also that a job not only provides an income, but greater independence, higher self-esteem and social cohesion as well.

Clearly, ending gender discrimination is not only morally right – it's economically smart. That's why the European Union has consistently championed gender equality and women's and girls' rights at home and abroad. Our development policy does this through specific measures and gender mainstreaming in our development aid programs.

Gender equality in employment involves giving women the same job opportunities as men, thanks to a lifelong focus that starts by putting more primary and secondary education, vocational training and informal learning, continues with access to decent work and social protection throughout their working lives, and ends with legal and social protection schemes for elderly women. This focus must employ a range of targeted, context-specific measures for the labour market. The aim should be to offer decent work, to close all gender gaps on the market, including the pay gap, to support women entrepreneurs, to offer more legal protection in areas like land and property rights, access to credit and inheritance issues, to recognise women's unpaid care work, and to promote measures that help them balance their work and family responsibilities, including parental leaves, with men sharing the burden equally.

Ultimately, gender equality and women's empowerment are vital to any society that aspires to be truly equal and democratic, and to our planet's sustainable development. That's why we believe the international community must make gender equality a central pillar of the post-2015 framework that will follow the Hyogo Framework. Forward to a time in which, from cradle to grave, all people are truly equal."

"We need to make sure that the crucial objective of education for girls figures prominently in the post-2015 development framework. We need to continue calling for all girls and boys, regardless of gender or disability, to have equal access to free and compulsory education."

**UNESCO**
MARGARETA WAHLSTRÖM
United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction

Every year, more than 200 million people are affected by natural disasters. Many will bear the brunt of recurring floods, storms, or droughts, and the majority of them will be women and girls. They all have a right to be equipped for survival, and they all have a right to contribute to keeping their communities safe from harm.

However, disasters highlight and accentuate the vulnerabilities of women while they reinforce, perpetuate and increase gender inequality.

Existing approaches in disaster risk reduction are not only unable to address gender-based vulnerabilities, but also miss the skills and capabilities of women as individuals and as a group. Ignoring the female voice as a disaster context is foolish in the extreme. We know that some of the most powerful recovery programs in the wake of disasters are driven by women who have survived the worst. Women are often considered as victims and the most vulnerable group for resource mobilisation, rather than as sources of strength and resilience in their own right. Countries that do not actively promote the full participation of women in education, politics, and the workforce will struggle more and more when it comes to rechanneling risk and adapting to climate change. Gender equality is thus an essential element of our work in building resilience to disasters and in managing the risk to lives, jobs, and property. It is also, literally, a matter of life and death if women and girls are not empowered to participate fully in disaster management and planning.

**Empowering women and girls to participate fully in disaster management and planning is ‘a matter of life and death’, says Margareta Wahlström.**

We need to promote gender equality in social, cultural and economic development, and mainstream gender concerns and needs into disaster risk reduction. The Hyogo Framework clearly states that, “A gender perspective should be integrated into all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision-making processes, including those related to risk assessment, early warning, information management and education and training.”

We need to address the gender-based gaps and imbalances by advocating the importance and necessity of integrating gender perspectives as disaster risk reduction to achieve the overarching goals of the Hyogo Framework, and build partnerships for mainstreaming gender perspectives into disaster risk reduction. Developing practical tools and providing good practices to increase women’s voice and visibility of their roles and contributions in the disaster risk reduction process at global, national and local levels, are of the utmost importance. We need more women volunteering at the community level, and we need more women in senior positions as disaster managers. A world in which exposure to disaster is growing exponentially – and causing ever-higher economic losses – needs all the female help that it can get.

Women need to be a force in resilience building and gender equality at disaster risk reduction. This means that the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction should provide a clear entry point for promoting gender perspectives in governance, in dealing with both climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, since it is a self-destruction to exclude or diminish opportunities for women to contribute their particular perspectives and expertise. Gender imbalance must be made an integral and a central criterion as opposed to a cross-cutting norm.
Closing the gender gap

The post-2015 framework must be rights-based and address the persistent structural drivers of gender inequality.

Iratxe García Pérez MEP
Chair of the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee

We are on the cusp of a pivotal moment: 2015 will set the framework for sustainable development for years to come. This time, we must get it right. We must learn from the mistakes of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While there is much to commend the MDGs for, there are also many lessons we can learn from the mistakes of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We must ensure that the post-2015 framework is rights-based and address the persistent structural drivers of gender inequality.

In 2015 and beyond, we must work towards eliminating all forms of discrimination against girls and women in all domains and at all levels. Too often today, women and girls are left with no or little say over the decisions that affect them. We must therefore ensure that girls can participate and influence all spheres of public and private life, and have a voice in decision-making.

As the chair of the women’s rights and gender equality committee, the promotion and protection of girls’ rights is of utmost importance to me. The actions we take today to empower girls will be critical for our future and for the whole of society – now and in the future.

Investing in and empowering girls is the best way to ensure a high return for girls themselves and society as a whole, and to overcome social and economic inequalities in the long-term. EU policies, legislation and funding must therefore promote a positive, immediate and lasting impact on girls’ rights and well-being.

Together with my colleagues in the Parliament, the European Commission and European External Action Service, I will endeavour to ensure girls remain at the heart of our work.

Turning crisis into opportunity

The struggle for political, social and economic equality for women and girls has in many ways defined the last century in the western world. Progress has been huge, which continues to make significant improvements in many areas. Yet there is still much work to be done.

My question is whether the next decade can see equal progress for girls in the most challenging settings – the conflict-affected communities of low and middle income countries where girls never mind the scale of inequality, dignity never minds the power, soon to be lost their lives.

The IRC has led programmes in conflict and natural disaster settings that support young girls to learn numeracy and financial literacy and older girls to readily establish networks of friends and role models, preventing violence. These are locations where girls are able to get their hands on opportunities and to make financial decisions.

The IRC works to ensure that education – even in emergencies – is a priority. This means reaching girls’ children to learning numeracy and financial literacy and older girls to safely establish networks of friends and role models, preventing violence. These are locations where girls are able to get their hands on opportunities and to make financial decisions.

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The new costs of girls’ education and participation are not limited to education. The IRC is committed to ensuring that girls have the opportunity to access education, health care, jobs and skills.
Empowering women, empowering humanity

PHOEBUE MLAMBO-Ngcuka
Executive Director of UN Women

In 1995, world leaders and activists came together for the Beijing Women’s Conference. 189 nations adopted the Beijing Platform for Action: a visionary roadmap for equality between women and men, boys and girls. The Platform imagines a world where each woman and girl can exercise her freedoms and choices, and realise all her rights, such as to live free from violence, to go to school, to participate in decision-making and to earn equal pay for equal work. It continues to inspire my work and the work of UN Women as a whole.

Nearly 20 years later, more girls are in school, more women have access to health care, and more women are working and assuming positions of leadership. One in five members of parliament are women, up from one in 10 back in 1995. But this progress has been slow, and we still have a long way to go to achieve equality.

In 2014, women still earn less than men for equal work, too few women have a say in the decisions that affect their lives, and one in three women worldwide will suffer physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. Gaps in reproductive rights and health care leave 800 women dying from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth every day. We know it does not have to be this way.

On the 20th anniversary of Beijing, Governments, NGOs, and international organisations are reviewing progress made since 1995, and planning to accelerate action. This is a chance to reorient the worldwide movement for women’s rights, to promote women’s leadership, expand our communities and demand renewed commitment and real change. UN Women’s global campaign: Empowering Women, Empowering Humanity.

Equality for women in leadership means stronger and more responsive democracy, more resilient communities, and better prospects for international peace and security. Picture an end to “child brides”, and to violence against women and girls.

Picture it: Equality in education, wealthier women and girls, more women in leadership. One in three women worldwide have access to education, and more women are working and earning equal pay for equal work. It continues to inspire my work and the work of UN Women as a whole.

Women with Disabilities

Women with disabilities are widely disadvantaged in several key areas where compared with other women, men with disabilities, and society as a whole. These women face triple discrimination due to their disability, gender and developing world status. One of the explanatory factors is the continued gender stereotypes and discrimination against women with disabilities, and society as a whole. These women are stigmatised and discriminated against, to “child brides”, and to violence against women and girls.

Equality is not a women's issue, it is an issue for humanity. That’s why earlier this year, we launched #Solidarity, a solidarity movement for gender equality. The campaign strengthens the support for women’s rights as human rights by enlisting men and endorsing them to put themselves forward as advocates for gender equality.

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So wherever you are, wherever you are, I call on you to join the campaign and have your say. In your school, your community, online, and in the streets, let’s make gender equality a reality – now.

On the other hand, it is important to take into account the concerns of women with disabilities as a cross-cutting theme at all levels of policy planning, implementation and monitoring. The CRPD notes that governments, non-governmental organisations, including international NGOs, and disabled peoples organisations should take appropriate measures to empower women with disabilities and ensure their participation. Through the development of practical strategies, the allocation of sufficient funding and the promotion of their representation, women with disabilities will have better access to equal opportunities.

As CEO of the National Forum of Women with Disabilities of Pakistan and as a woman with a disability, I believe the coming years will be crucial. With the support of all stakeholders, including the United Nations, the European Union and other governments, women with disabilities will become more visible as leaders and catalysts of change.

A long walk to school

Onia, 14, won’t let anything get in her way of her right to an education.

“I will make any sacrifices I have to in order to improve my future. Even though I have to walk a long way to school, even though I get tired and hungry while on the road, even though I face many challenges just because I’m a girl, I will keep fighting,”

Onia, who will stop at nothing to go to school, despite the two-hour walk each day. Onia attends the only school in her district. School starts at 8am, so she has to be ready to go by 6am. “I have to get up very early every morning. Before I leave for school I need to finish doing the housework, like washing the plates and collecting water. Then I get ready to go to school,” she says.

Onia’s mother, 41, has no public transport in Onia’s community, just a pickup truck, so walking is the most common way to get around. She walks all the way to school, passing along small roads early in the morning, which can be dangerous. “When I get to the main road I find my friends and we all walk to school together. We could get a ride with the truck but it passes our school, but the driver never stops for us and we don’t even have the money to pay,” she says.

Although exhausting, Onia won’t give up on her education. “Because I want to get a better future, I have to make sacrifices,” she says. “I want to be a teacher when I grow up.”

PHOTO: UN Women Executive Director Phoebue Mlambo-Ngcuka visits Zaatari refugee camp for Syrian refugees during her visit to Jordan in February 2014

Leaders and catalysts of change

Photo: Paul / Paul/UN Women

Women and girls with disabilities must be empowered to participate equally in society.

ABIA AKRAM
CEO of the Pakistan National Forum of Women with Disabilities

The systematic exclusion of persons with disabilities, and their girls, women with disabilities, from the rest of society is the key factor behind the growing campaigns for the reform of customary disability policies worldwide. According to the World Health Organisation, within the global population more than a billion people – about 15 per cent of the world’s population – are living with some form of disability. In developing countries, women constitute up to three quarters of all persons with disabilities, and between 65 per cent and 70 per cent of these women live in rural areas. Through the efforts of the International Disability Movement in solidarity with national State parties, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was established in 2006. The CRPD has provided the guidance to influence structures, service provision and policies in order to bring about a change in the lives of persons with disabilities.

Despite all the efforts and progress, women with disabilities are widely disadvantaged in several key areas where compared with other women, men with disabilities, and society as a whole. These women face triple discrimination due to their disability, gender and developing world status. One of the explanatory factors is the continued gender stereotypes and discrimination against women with disabilities, and society as a whole. These women are stigmatised and discriminated against, to “child brides”, and to violence against women and girls.

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“Where women prosper, societies prosper; where women suffer, so do the societies they live in.”

Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / European Commission Vice-President

PHOTO: Phoebue Mlambo-Ngcuka

Empowerment

PHOTO: Girls’ Rights Gazette

PHOTO: Plan / Richard Wainwright

PHOTO: UN Women Jordan / Abdullah Ayoub

PHOTO: PAI / Roland/UN Women

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Education key to driving social change

Stepping up action for adolescent girls

Working to end child marriage

Almost half of all girls in South Asia are married before the age of 18

JASMINE WHITERIGHT
CEO of Save the Children International

Although progress has been made to end child marriage, the practice remains widespread. In some fragile and emergency contexts, there is evidence that child marriage can increase. War and conflict in Syria has had a devastating impact on women and children. I have not met families who did not fear for their girls’ lives. They are afraid of what the future holds and most are now living in conditions that are worse from what they knew in Syria, mothers trying to make a refugee camp feel like home.

Our recent research shows the incidence of child marriage is increasing within both Syria and among Syrian refugees in neighboring countries. Parents marry off their young daughters in a survival strategy and to protect their daughters as best they can.

Girls like 16-year-old Nadia, who is living in a refugee community in Amman, Jordan. “I got married when I was 15 years old. I was forced to marry because my family and I – 10 people – were sharing a very small house with only two rooms. We had to get married, and it was a day five if you’re unlucky more than of jen,” she says. “I was aspiring to get an education that my mother could afford and I could go to a doctor I left school and didn’t finish my 11th year and we came to Jordan. Everything got destroyed.”

Yet the consequences for girls are often devastating. Child marriage also often denies a girl her right to an education and leaves her far less likely to seek health services and to access reproductive opportunities that access to quality schooling would give. As a result, child brides bear children who come from poor families in the first place – are likely to remain poor.

Child brides usually become child mothers. Complications from adolescent pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death for girls aged 15–19 in many developing countries. About one million children born to adolescent mothers each year do not make it to their first birthday.

Development efforts to end child marriage through providing economic support and incentives to girls and their families; enhancing girls’ access to a high quality education; rallying parents and community members around the issue, informing girls of their rights and ensuring political commitments to ending the practice.

With less than 5 days to go before the target date of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), empowering girls and tackling child marriage are the leading cause of death for girls, infant and child mortality, and therefore to meet the fourth MDG of a two-thirds reduction in child mortality by 2015.

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Girls still face barriers to sexual autonomy

VICKY CLAYES
Regional Director of PPFE, lead learner of Civilizations 2015 Europe

Oftentimes, girls and boys are treated differently in society due to cultural taboos and social expectations. This is particularly evident in the case of young girls who are often subjected to harmful practices such as genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), which is still perpetuated in many parts of the world.

Shifting social norms through dialogue and education is crucial in challenging the social norms and attitudes that perpetuate these practices. Leaders and influential individuals in the community should participate in dialogues with leaders to convince and involve them in these efforts.

In sub-Saharan Africa, young women are three times more likely to be living with HIV than young men.

Securing a brighter future for girls

RENAE BAIDER
Executive Director of Deutsche Stiftung Welthervorkehrung

Over the past 20 years working in this organization, I have been fortunate to witness significant progress in advancing the cause of young women and girls. However, it is crucial that we continue to push for a world in which girls are not only safe and free from violence, but also have the opportunity to make informed decisions. The impact of strong, informed choices about sex, sexuality and relationships is crucial in shaping the future of young girls.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights must be prioritised in the post-2015 agenda.

RENATE BAEHR
Director of Special Initiatives, ACCORD

At ACCORD, we have seen how important it is to secure the rights of women to play the “Girl Effect” role in shaping their own futures – enabling them to take a well-informed decision, thus reducing the risk of unintended pregnancies and the consequences from pregnancy, such as death and permanent sterilization.

Shifting social norms

LOUISA VINTON
Life President Coordinator and UNDP
Resident Representative in Croatia

Twenty years ago, during the Croatian War of Independence, many women were victims of sexual violence. Sexual violence during armed conflict is a crime described as “one of history’s greatest silences” – a crime whose impact is devastating but whose perpetrators are often invisible or unrepentant. A crime whose victims, while recognized, never receive legal redress. The need for action is not straightforward, but it is possible if their specific needs are addressed through an holistic approach. This is what the UNDP pilot project that provides psycho-social support to victims of sexual violence in Croatia, specifically, through a range of services that can help women and girls access the advice they need to make informed decisions. The impact of strong, informed choices about sex, sexuality and relationships is crucial in shaping the future of young girls.

Women and girls should also be actively involved in these experiences entitle them to have a central role. In some communities, girls are often excluded from these social norms and attitudes that build them.

According to the latest UNFPA report, one of the major obstacles to economic growth and prosperity is the high number of unintended pregnancies among teenagers living in low- and middle-income countries. It is still shocking that 3.7 million girls under age 18 years living in these countries give birth each day. This means that for each day of the year, an estimated 20,000 babies are born to school-age girls. Of these births, about two million are to 15-year-old girls or young women, many of whom are Still going through their growth spurts and are often not ready for the responsibility of childbearing. This two-year discrepancy between boys and girls leads to different outcomes for young people. Young girls are more likely to experience post-natal complications such as obstetric fistula and face stigma and discrimination. The impact on girls and their families and communities is enormous.

It is vital that we work together towards securing universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for all girls and young women. This is one of the key goals of the Girl Declaration, backed by the UNFPA and supported by the governments in ensuring the G7’s 2015 target of 90% girls being entitled to have a central role. In some communities, girls are often excluded from these social norms and attitudes that build them.

In many countries around the world, governments police young people’s sexual behavior or allow little space for young people to engage in sexual activity. These laws are further illustrated with laws that make it illegal for young people to engage in sexual activity. These laws are an obstacle to young people’s sexual development and exercise their human rights.

Girls still face barriers to sexual autonomy

SHIRIDAMARLOM
Communications and Advocacy Director of World Vision Philippines

Despite a United Nations’ resolution and several national laws banning female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and early marriage, many communities still perpetuate these harmful practices. Currently, 125 million women are living with the consequences of FGM/C, while 13.5 million underage girls are being married every year.

These practices are a vivid reminder of the violation of the rights of women and, of the responsibility of global actors, to strengthen protection mechanisms, and represent an important barrier to development. They result in girls and women’s health and education is negatively affected. Early marriage leads to a lack of education, poor child and maternal health as well as widespread poverty.

These harmful practices are based on traditions, cultural and religious misconceptions, and on a system of values which perpetuate gender inequality. Traditionally, FGM/C and early marriages aim to control a woman’s body and prevent her from being able to access the advice she needs to make informed decisions. The impact on girls of strong, informed choices about sex, sexuality and relationships is crucial in shaping the future of young girls.

Community members celebrate a call to action to end FGM

PHOTO: SECDIKA ODIK

Securing a brighter future for girls

PHOTO: FABIO SEIDIN

Girls still face barriers to sexual autonomy

PHOTO: PATI JUDE

Securing a brighter future for girls

Shifting social norms

PHOTO: PEI / Sedium Diop

Securing a brighter future for girls

PHOTO: Fabio Seidin
Global priorities post 2015

No going back on girls’ right to education

The school environment must be a place where gender inequalities are addressed, says Irina Bokova

IRINA BOKOVA
Director General of UNESCO

In 2011, there were 31 million girls out of school. An estimated 55 per cent of them are expected never to enrol. On current trends, it is projected that 70 per cent of out-of-school girls will have achieved parity in primary education, but only 56 per cent will have achieved parity in secondary education. Over 100 million young women living in low and lower middle income countries are unable to read a single sentence – even if they have been to school. This is unacceptable, and constitutes a massive loss of human potential.

Social norms are making it hard for girls in Eastern Europe and Central Asia to access reliable contraception

LENE STAVGAARD
JPFP European Network Regional President

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the use of modern contraceptives is alarmingly low. The “art” of withdrawal is seen as a sign of virility and as the man’s responsibility. A study by UNFPA in 2012 showed that in several middle-income countries in the region, usage was below 20 per cent, which is the average in the world’s poorest countries. One of the reasons for this is that social norms make it difficult, if not impossible, for girls to find out about and get hold of reliable contraception. Mukho culture means that girls will often refuse to use condoms and prohibit their partners from using other modern contraceptives, so that a “good” method is one that can be used without a man’s knowledge. For young people in particular, a lack of confidentiality, trust and privacy is a huge obstacle to accessing modern contraceptives. In 2012, research in the region, led by the European Network, confirmed that social norms contribute to the very low use of modern contraception, even when this is available and relatively affordable. It is only through these external pressures and support that states where child marriage is a problem will introduce the changes necessary to eliminate it.

Concerns about sexual and reproductive health and rights are another key element of the post-2015 agenda. The right to education requires the right to sexuality education that covers gender, rights and sexuality. Promoting condoms and modern methods of birth control is about preventing unplanned pregnancy and health problems, including HIV. It is essential that governments support the right to choose contraceptives, as a family planning method would help tackle the social norms defining men’s role in avoiding pregnancy, as well as protecting against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. It is essential that men are included in these efforts with due respect for their needs.

Enabling girls to make their own life decisions

No going back on girls’ right to education

Photo: UN Photo / Paulo Filgueiras

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It is only through education, access and male involvement that we can enable girls and women to enjoy good sexual and reproductive health and make their own life decisions.

Child marriage occurs in societies where gender discrimination is ‘a brutal, unquestioned reality’

BARONESS JENNY TONGE
President of the European Parliamentary Team on Education and other partners,

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The European Week of Action for Girls is organised by Plan EU Office under the patronage of the European Parliament and in partnership with United Nations Brussels. Supported by.

contact: louise.hagendijk@plan-international.org

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