

## Gender footprint

*“Women are half the world’s population, yet they do two-thirds of the world’s work, earn one-tenth of the world’s income, and own less than one per cent of the world’s property. They are among the poorest of the world’s poor”.* Barber Conable, former President of World Bank

### Women on an unequal footing

Gender inequality starts early and keeps women at a disadvantage throughout their lives. In some countries, infant girls are less likely to survive than infant boys because their parents favour the boys and neglect the girls.

Girls often receive less food than boys do. They are more likely to drop out of school and to receive less education than boys.

#### **So what is a gender footprint ?**

Put simply, this is the environmental, economic, social and political impact men and women have purely as a result of whether they are male or female. In most cultures men have a much larger footprint than women. This gives men much greater power. This power is often used over women and leaves them **disempowered**. When women have a larger and stronger gender footprint families, communities and societies at large tend to benefit.

#### **Gender inequality: how it measures up**

- Of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty around the world, 70% are women
- 130 million primary school age children do not attend school; 60% of these are girls.
- By age 18, girls have received an average of 4.4 years less education than boys.
- Pregnancies and childbirth-related health problems take the lives of around 500,000 women each year; that’s one woman every minute.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, a woman faces a 1 in 13 chance of dying in childbirth. In Western Europe, the risk is 1 in 3,200.
- Women do about 66% of the world's work in return for less than 5% of its income
- At least one in three girls and women worldwide has been beaten or abused in her lifetime.
- Of every 10 people killed or wounded during armed conflict 8 are women or children
- Only around 6 in every 100 government ministers in the world are women.

Historically women have been seen as less important than men socially, economically, politically and culturally.

**Social inequality** has come about because of the different roles and responsibilities women and men often have. For example, men tend to do heavier and riskier work that often takes place outside or away from home. Women’s work has traditionally been in the home caring for children and the elderly, and providing food for the family.

Traditions and customs also create inequality by, for example, encouraging or even forcing girls to marry very young. This means they are likely to have children young, trapping them in the home and preventing them from undertaking other work, roles and responsibilities. Having children at a very young age can also have dangerous consequences on women’s health.

**Economic inequality** has come about because women often have unequal access to resources, in particular money, land and property. They often have very limited opportunities for employment which in turn makes it difficult or impossible to improve their economic situation. Furthermore, because women have unequal access to education and training opportunities, they are less likely to learn the skills required to work.

**Political inequality** has come about because women are very poorly represented at all levels of decision making in society. The legal system in many countries also discriminates against women.

### Women taking a kicking

The experience or threat of violence affects the lives of millions of women everywhere. It can affect women of every race, age, culture, faith, nationality, profession and financial situation. No region, country or culture in the world is free from violence against women.

Discrimination and inequality are at the root of violence against women. These in turn are a result of:

- Men using their more powerful positions to disempower women
- Customs and traditions associated with particular cultures
- The idea that what happens in the home – for example **domestic violence** – is ‘private’
- Violence carried out by soldiers and other military personnel during wars and conflicts
- Lack of action by governments

### **Did you know?**

#### **Like mother like daughter**

The lives of mothers and daughters are very closely linked. If a girl is brought up in an environment where her rights to education, health, nutrition and protection are met her life when she becomes a woman will be greatly improved. But, if the mother has no education, works long hours and is denied rights to control her own life, the chances are that she will find it very difficult to provide a better life for her child. Children with uneducated mothers, for example, are at least twice as likely to not attend school as children whose mothers attended primary school.

#### **How do we break this vicious circle of gender inequality?**

one crucial way is to invest in the education of girls. The Millennium Report says: “Experience has shown, over and over again, that investments in girls’ education translate directly and quickly into better nutrition for the whole family, better health care, declining **fertility rate**, poverty reduction and better overall economic performance.”

#### **Gender inequality and human rights**

From the beginning, the United Nations has always had the goal of equality between men and women. In 1945 the UN Charter stated the importance of equal rights for men and women. Then in 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This convention stated that all forms of discrimination against women were human-rights abuses. By 2005, 180 nations had signed up to CEDAW and these nations are legally responsible for eliminating all discrimination against women in their societies.

All the rights enshrined under the Convention on the Rights of the Child – rights related to education, health, play and relaxation, protection from danger and the right to have your say – apply equally to boys and girls. Therefore under this convention, which has been signed by almost every nation, all discrimination against girls is banned and governments have a duty to promote equality.

For further information on the Convention on the Rights of the Child [click here](#)

### **Did you know?**

#### **Governments around the world are ignoring commitments they have made for equal rights for women.**

At the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, most of the world’s governments agreed to improve the lives of women and girls. Government representatives agreed that development and progress aren't possible if half of a country's population is not considered equal. Yet despite this agreement, more than 40 countries have laws which discriminate against women. In many countries, women face violence, which governments do nothing to stop because other laws support customs like ‘honour’ killings, where a woman is killed by a family member if she does something which is thought to bring shame on the family. In some countries women are legally their husband's property, while in others, women cannot leave the house or get a job without a man's permission. In several countries laws also make it more difficult for women to own property or land or gain employment. So women end up legally and economically dependent

upon their husbands or other male relatives, despite commitments their governments have made to ensure they are on an equal footing with men.

### **Millennium Development Goals**

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were agreed at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000 and nearly 190 countries have signed up to them. The goals are international targets for reducing global poverty. They aim to lift around 500 million people out of poverty by the year 2015. If this happens, fewer women will die in childbirth, fewer people will die from treatable diseases, many more boys and girls will go to school and the lives of millions of people will improve dramatically.

Several of the MDGs relate specifically to the wellbeing of women and girls: Goal 2 calls for primary education for all girls and boys in the world; Goal 3 seeks to promote gender equality and empower women; and Goal 5 calls for an improvement in **maternal health**. However, it has become clear that progress on all the other MDGs is directly related to the implementation of women's rights and gender equality.

For more information on the Millennium Development Goals [click here](#)

### **Equal footprints: a better way forward for the world**

Societies and cultures where women have equal rights tend to be healthier, wealthier and generally more successful. When women are healthy, educated and have money to spend, their families, communities and nations benefit. Countries where women are more equal and involved in political decision making also tend to have less corrupt and better organised systems of government. All this means that more equal societies develop more quickly and strongly.

Inequalities between women and men on the other hand tend to result in less successful economies with nations more likely to stay poor. Research in India for example found that in some Indian villages men are likely to spend a large part of their money for personal use such as smoking, drinking, or gambling while the women use almost all of their income on important family needs such as food, medical treatment, school fees and children's clothing.

### **Equal footprints: what do they look like?**

Try to think about a world in which men and women were equal. What would it look like? Make a list, thinking about the following areas of life: at home, at school, at work, in government,

### **Which of the following was in your list?**

- Women sharing equally in household decisions about food, health care, schooling and other family necessities
- Women and men not being stereotyped at home, school or at work because they are female or male
- Women having equal opportunities to do meaningful paid work – if that is what they chose to do – and would be paid as much as men for doing that work
- Women having their say and being listened to when it comes to decision making and politics

### **Case studies**

None found as yet...

### **Putting your foot down: taking action to reduce gender inequality**

The most important way to work for gender equality is to be sure that you personally adopt attitudes and live your life in a way that shows you respect a person irrespective of whether they are male or female; man or woman; boy or girl. If you are a girl or a woman, never stop believing that your voice is valuable and your contribution is needed to improve the world around you. If you are a boy or a man, respect women as you respect yourself. And, whatever your gender, be aware of any

signs of inequality around you – at home, at school and in society at large. Shout loud when you spot inequalities; don't tolerate it!

### **Campaign for gender equality**

As aware and active global citizens we can work to persuade governments of the importance and urgency of gender equality and the benefits to society and the economy of equality between men and women. Here are some groups campaigning on the issue of gender equality; they provide information on how to campaign effectively and suggest actions you can take:

[Voices of Youth](#) – a UNICEF website outlining areas where action is needed if equality between men and women, boys and girls is to be achieved

[Amnesty International](#) – a special campaign on violence against women

[End Poverty Millennium Campaign](#) – gender equity

### **Learn more**

→ Links:

[Global Education: gender](#)

[Voices of Youth](#): search this site to find out how gender equality benefits everyone.

[You think!](#) World Bank website created by young people: has pages on gender

### **Glossary**

**Disempower[ed]:** to take away power, authority, or influence leaving someone feeling weak and unimportant.

**Domestic violence:** abuse that happens in the home within a family unit.

**Fertility rate:** the average number of children born to mothers; a reduction in the fertility rate in countries that have very high rates is generally seen as a good thing because it means women are having fewer children and probably having them later in life. This allows women to do other things in life such as educational or work opportunities. In turn, as evidence has shown, this helps her (fewer) children have a better life.

**Gender/Gender inequality:** gender refers to the different roles, responsibilities and behaviours men and women undertake in a culture or society. It is therefore much more than whether a person is male or female in the physical sense. Gender inequality refers to the unequal opportunities and treatment men and women experience as a result of their gender.

**Maternal health:** the health of women during pregnancy, childbirth and the period following childbirth