

Girls left behind: an invisible population in French development policy?

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**EQUILIBRES &
POPULATIONS**

Thanks

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Equilibres & Populations

Equilibres & Populations is an international charity created by French doctors and journalists in 1993, at the time of the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. E&P works to improve the status and living conditions of women and girls, especially their sexual and reproductive health and rights, which are a necessary condition for sustainable development.

Today, Equilibres & Populations is an agency with 13 employees and 22 members, with an annual budget of 1.5 million euros. E&P headquarters are in Paris. Three years ago, the agency also set up a regional office in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

E&P acts as an advocate with decision-makers in the North and in the South, and combines this with on-the-ground actions in partnership with African associations. The data from innovative methods in the field are used to advocate for policies and programs on a much larger scale. The data also makes it easier to retain the financial support of donors.

The themes E&P emphasizes include, among others, the improvement of development policy and practice; reinforcement for development and health workers; assistance in the creation of better health systems; advocacy and actions to end harmful traditional customs (specifically female sexual mutilation); the promotion of maternal health; better sexual and reproductive health for young people; and AIDS/HIV prevention.

Equilibres & Populations relies on several different networks (lawmakers, associations, researchers, etc.) and uses a multi-disciplinary approach, including public health, demography, political science and social anthropology. Over the years, it has joined several larger groups, such as Coordination Sud in France, and Eurongos, which is Europe-wide.

E&P's Vision

There are no universal solutions in human development. But there are major principles to be followed.

- Equity and social justice. Everyone should have the same chance to become socially, politically, and economically active.
- Sustainability. Present success must not be acquired at the expense of future generations. This goes back to the notion of intergenerational equity.
- Respect for human rights. This includes social, cultural, and economic rights.
- Improvement in women's status and living conditions, especially their sexual and reproductive health and rights. This is both a factor and an indicator of development. No sustainable development can occur without the inclusion of the female half of mankind.

E&P's Mission

Equilibres & Populations assists civil society in developing countries, especially those involved with these causes in West Africa.

Equilibres & Populations acts as an interface between civil society there and the decision-makers in the North and in the South, as well as between the research and the actual policy and practice of development.

Equilibres & Populations bases its work on the gender approach, on participation, partnerships, and political and community mobilization.

Summary

This study evaluates the extent to which the question of young girls in vulnerable situations was taken into account in French development policy at the end of the year 2011. The study has shown that currently, young girls are almost invisible in the strategy and implementation of French government programs. When cooperation policies do have some effect on girls, it has been incidental: girls are not the object of any particular strategy.

At the beginning of 2012, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs created a working group on girls, and the subject began to be addressed more directly. This study therefore gives an overview of the question at the end of 2011, bringing to light the factors that have made girls almost invisible in French cooperation policy, and which are challenges that the working group will have to take up.

The study first looks at the precariousness of the issue of girls, both worldwide and in France. In order to keep the question high on the agenda, it is important to find the happy medium between two kinds of arguments: the human rights approach, and the approach via efficiency in development policy.

The second part of the report shows that, in fact, girls do sometimes receive French development aid, but they are not thought of as a target group in any way. There are two reasons for this. Young girls are neither children nor women; and the approach by gender is still not a mainstream part of French development policy.

Lastly, the study highlights the fact that one of the main reasons for ignoring the problems of girls is that cooperation policy is not transparent. This is both regrettable (some lawmakers have deplored it) and desirable; as French government aid has become better integrated with international aid, it has become more efficient. Future efforts, therefore, should logically be concentrated at both the French (bilateral) and the international level (multilateral).

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Introduction

A. Who are the girls in vulnerable situations?

Among the 600 million girls living in developing countries, a large number find themselves in vulnerable or extremely vulnerable situations. They face poverty, discrimination, violence, and abuse. These girls have a high risk of being forced to drop out of school and to marry young. They also often face death and ill health from pregnancy and childbirth; HIV/AIDS infection; sexual violence; economic, social, and professional dependency on men; and the exploitation of their bodies.

- Worldwide, of the 130 million young people who do not go to school, 70 % are girls; 39 million of these girls have no access even to primary school¹.
- In developing countries, one out of seven girls is already married at 15, in certain countries even in childhood; and 38% of the girls in these countries are married by 18².
- Each year, in developing countries, 14 million girls between 15 and 19 years old give birth. The medical complications caused by these pregnancies are the number one cause of death of girls [women] between 15 and 19 worldwide³.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, in the 15-24 age group, new HIV infections afflict 8 girls for every boy⁴.
- Nearly half of victims of sexual aggression are younger than 15 years old⁵.

It must be emphasized that young girls are a population that is hard to identify and understand. There is no internationally recognized definition of adolescence. According to UNICEF and its partners UNFPA, WHO, and UNAIDS, adolescents are those aged 10 to 19. According to the United Nations General Assembly, the word “youth” applies to people aged 15 to 24, and the term “young people” to people aged 10 to 24. These definitions were adopted in 1985, during the International Youth Year, and are used by United Nations institutions and other partners. “Adolescence is difficult to define in precise terms, for several reasons,” says the UNICEF 2011 report on the State of the World’s Children. “Reference to the onset of puberty... cannot resolve the difficulty of definition.” The age of puberty varies greatly between individuals; national legal definitions vary along with the rate of participation of adolescents in adult activities; and many national systems of births registration are deficient.

1. (Human Rights Watch, “Promises Broken: An Assessment of Children’s Rights on the 10th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,” www.hrw.org/campaigns/crp/promises/education.html [December 1999].)
2. Population Council, “Transitions to Adulthood: Child Marriage/Married Adolescents,” www.popcouncil.org/ta/mar.html [updated May 13, 2008]
3. Emin Miriam, Levine Ruth, *Start with a Girl: A New Agenda for Global Health*, Washington, DC, Global Center for Development, 2009, p. 39.
4. 2010 UNAIDS Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic.
5. 2010 UN Report on Women.

This study is most concerned with girls who are vulnerable because of their situation. Particularly at risk are girls from 10-14, girls who are not going to school, girls who are already married or living without their parents, girls who live on the street, domestic workers, and girls living in a zone of conflict or war. It should also be emphasized that girls can be in danger in places where they should feel safe, such as at home with their family, at school, or in other community places like sports centers⁶.

B. Appraisal of the situation at the end of 2011, in a quickly changing world

The question of young girls is beginning to be seen as more important in development agendas everywhere. Because of this, it is to be noted that this study was conducted between spring and autumn of 2011, and should be seen as a report on the situation at a particular time, the end of 2011.

C. General Issues and Main Findings

Before this study, it seems that there has been little available information either on French policy towards young girls or on public aid destined to help them. The goal of this report has been to find out whether this apparent invisibility of girls in vulnerable situations actually means that they have been left out of French development policy.

The finding of this report is that, although there are in fact French programs that help these girls, there was no formal policy or strategy of helping them, at least not by the end of 2011, and that therefore the issues specific to these girls have not really been identified nor the girls helped to become more active in their own right. Moreover, politicians seem to have become more interested in this population in vulnerable situations mainly for reasons of economy and efficiency, which puts the aid in a weak position. Girls in vulnerable situations are at the intersection of three groups: children/youth, women, and populations in vulnerable situations, and they are most often considered as part of one or the other group. The problem is that these three fields of intervention seem especially difficult for French policy, even more so now that European and international cooperation make it difficult to trace the effects of French policy and limit its flexibility. This report looks at French policy at two levels: first at what is being said in texts and public discourse, then at what is actually being done.

6. The Division for the Advancement of Women in collaboration with UNICEF, *Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, Report of the Expert Group Meeting, 2006*, p.5.

D. Methodology

To define the limits of the study, we interviewed agents of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères et Européennes); the Agence Française de Développement (AFD); a French woman legislator; and representatives of French NGOs concerned with development who receive French government funds. The subject of this report was difficult by definition, as it involves analysis of an unacknowledged or non-existent area. It was not always easy to find the information, numbers, or explanations of the reasons behind the lack of attention to the subject in this or that program or area. Some of the people we wished to speak with decided not to meet us, justifying their refusal by the absence of tangible material on the subject.

It became obvious that many French men and women other than those we spoke to in the framework of this study also deal with young girls as a population, either specifically or as part of other work. Obviously our study could not be exhaustive and it reflects these limits. Its ambition is simply to investigate French development policy at a moment in time, the end of 2011, and to present an analysis and possible forecasts.



I. Feeble efforts to help girls

Girls, especially girls in vulnerable situations, are one of the populations that have recently come to the fore of the international agenda, and this has caused more interest in the issue among French politicians. The economic argument that dominates the international discussion at the moment does, however, weaken the justification for more attention to girls' human rights.

A. A recent rise in awareness

1. Girls begin to appear on the international agenda

For the past few years, girls have received growing attention at an international level. In November 2007, a special inter-institutional task force, the UN IATF, was set up by UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund), UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), the WHO (World Health Organization), and the FNUPI (Funds of the United Nations for the International Partnerships). This task force founded an inter-institutional framework program for the most marginalized adolescent girls, aiming to ensure "that programs of cooperation with governments and civil society make known the situation of adolescent girls and prescribe practical action to fulfill their rights."⁷

In October 2008, the World Bank launched the Adolescent Girls Initiative (AGI) to promote "the transition of adolescent girls from school to productive employment through interventions that are tested, and then scaled-up or replicated if successful."⁸ More recently, UNICEF titled its 2011 report on the state of the world's children "Adolescence: An Age of Opportunity."⁹ The report pays special attention to the themes of sexual and reproductive health, sexual equality, early marriage, and female sexual mutilation.

Besides these initiatives by international institutions, there have been campaigns by various non-governmental organizations and coalitions. The Coalition for Adolescent Girls¹⁰ unites more than 30 organizations working for young girls, using a platform of information and tools. "The Girl Effect" is one of the main campaigns by members of this alliance.¹¹ Others are "The Power of Girls"¹², a joint initiative by Care and the Girl Scouts of America; "Girl Up"¹³ by the United Nations Foundation; and "Because I Am a Girl,"¹⁴ launched by Plan International and taken up by Plan France.

7. UNICEF website:

http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/index_girls.html, 16 February 2012.

8. World Bank website:

<http://www.worldbank.org>, August 29, 2011.

9. *State of the World's Children*, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), February 2011.

10. The coalition for adolescent girls, <http://coalitionforadolescentgirls.org/>, August 29, 2011.

11. The Girl Effect, <http://www.girleffect.org/>, August 29, 2011.

12. The Power of Girls, <http://www.care.org/thepowerofgirls>, <http://www.girlscouts.org/thepowerofgirls/>, August 29 2011.

13. Girl Up, <http://www.girlup.org/>, August 29, 2011.

14. Because I Am a Girl, <http://www.plan-uk.org/becauseiamagirl/>, August 29, 2011.

WHO / ILO / UNESCO / UNFPA / UNICEF / UNIFEM / UN JOINT STATEMENT – March 3, 2010

As leaders gather for the fifteen-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action, we, the members of the United Nations Adolescent Girls Task Force, jointly pledge to intensify our efforts to fulfil the human rights of adolescent girls. During the next five years, we will aim to increase our agencies' support to developing countries to advance key policies and programmes that empower the hardest-to-reach adolescent girls, particularly those aged 10 to 14 years.

Many of the 600 million adolescent girls living in developing countries remain invisible in national policies and programmes. Millions live in poverty, are burdened by gender discrimination and inequality, and are subject to multiple forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation, such as child labour, child marriage and other harmful practices. The full potential of these girls and their contribution to their communities have yet to be realized.

We are convinced that educated, healthy and skilled adolescent girls will help build a better future, advance social justice, support economic development, and combat poverty. They will stay in school, marry later, delay childbearing, have healthier children, and earn better incomes that will benefit themselves, their families, communities and nations. Investing in their rights and empowerment will help accelerate the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

We will work with governments, civil society, communities, adolescent girls and boys on five strategic priorities:

- 1) Educate adolescent girls: Ensure adolescent girls have access to quality education and complete schooling, focusing on their transition from primary to post-primary education and training, including secondary education, and pathways between the formal and non-formal systems.
- 2) Improve adolescent girls' health: Ensure adolescent girls' access to age-appropriate health and nutrition information and services, including life skills-based sexuality education, HIV prevention, and sexual and reproductive health.
- 3) Keep adolescent girls free from violence: Prevent and protect girls from all forms of gender-based violence, abuse and exploitation, and ensure that girls who experience violence receive prompt protection, services and access to justice.
- 4) Promote adolescent girl leaders: Ensure that adolescent girls gain essential economic and social skills and are supported by mentors and resources to participate in community life.
- 5) Count adolescent girls: Work with partners to collect, analyse, and use data on adolescent girls to advocate for, develop and monitor evidence-based policies and programmes that advance their well-being and realize their human right.

We will work in a coordinated manner with other relevant global initiatives. We call on Member States to join us in accelerating efforts to protect the rights of adolescent girls. Together, we can build a future of gender equality and social justice.

2. The effects of this movement in France

In France, this movement to help young girls took a political turn, leading to the G20/8 Parliamentary Summit, held in Paris in May 2011. It was jointly organized by the NGO Equilibres & Populations; the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPF); the French Movement for Family Planning; and the group “Parlementaires Français en Action.”

The parliamentary appeal signed by those at the summit urged G20 and G8 leaders to “draw the world’s attention to two aspects of human rights that are currently among the most neglected- the situation facing girls and young women, and the challenges posed by global population dynamics.”

However, this initiative did not have much effect in France, for reasons explained by Danielle Bousquet, MP at the French National Assembly and vice-president of the Assembly’s delegation on women’s rights and equality of opportunity. First, “development policy is not part of the big debates in the National Assembly. We talk about it once a year, when the budget is being discussed.” Also, “the question of women always appears as a secondary issue, whether women in France or in the global South. The issue is not part of public debate in France.”



Following the summit, a certain amount of rhetoric about young girls began to appear in France politics. For example, in discussing UN Security Council Resolution 1983, on HIV/AIDS in armed conflicts, which was adopted on June 7, 2011, French foreign ministry representatives “supported the introduction of language on women and girls, who have been identified as a more vulnerable population,” said Saran Branchi, in charge of UN health affairs at the French foreign ministry. She adds that this language was also adopted at the UN’s High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS, held in New York June 8-10, 2011. Likewise, Henri de Raincourt, French Minister for Cooperation, called attention to the plight of young girls in his speech on the occasion of the World Bank’s publication of its report on gender, September 26, 2011, as well as during the budget debate on public aid to development in the National Assembly on November 7, 2011. Reminding his audience of France’s commitment to maternal and child health, Raincourt said, “It is obvious that young girls are the most exposed, vulnerable group.”

B. The efficiency approach versus the human rights approach

1. Investing in girls

In May 2011, in a message re-broadcast during the G20/8 Parliamentary Summit in Paris, Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women, stated, “Investing in girls is an intelligent economic policy.” The summit also emphasized the role of girls in the dynamics of development, especially with the demographic argument that investing in their sexual and reproductive health leads to a postponement of first pregnancies and a drop in the total number of births. This means less population growth and in the long term has a positive impact on a country’s economic situation. In this approach, an interest in the situation of girls seems to be justified mainly by a cost-benefit analysis. Danielle Bousquet discussed this during her speech at the Paris Summit. “Excluding women and girls is expensive, and investing in them is profitable. But this argument is not good enough. What if these people are not profitable in 30 or 40 years’ time? Equality on the condition of profitability alone is not equality.”

2. France combines the two approaches

The MP nevertheless admits that “there are two ways to look at the question. There is the problem of girls’ human rights. Because young girls are human beings, they should have access to the same human rights as everyone else, but today they do not. That argument is for people who already agree. For other people, you have to say, ‘You still need to take care of this, because you are going to have to deal with it one way or another.’” For her, the economic approach is a “detour for educational purposes.”

The French attitude, represented at this same event by Henri de Raincourt, combines both approaches. He stated that “France supported inserting this issue into the center of the G8 agenda because France is resolute in its advocacy of women’s and girls’ human rights.” He concluded, “You can count upon France, with the support of its partners, to ensure that women and girls are no longer forgotten in development policy, but instead become the mainstay of progress and prosperity in their communities.”

Thus, in the past few years, young girls have become a group that must be considered in the international agenda. France has taken note, and is beginning to include the issue in its official discourse. But does the new attention mean that this population was absent earlier from French development programs? It appears that, before girls became visible as a group to policy-makers, they were viewed in several different ways.



II. A population treated as incidental

As Pauline Chabbert, the French foreign ministry's point person on gender, explained in 2011, "Girls as such are not part of our strategy, or at least not in so many words. They do not appear in gender and development strategy. We treat the issue in a disguised form, in three types of programs": for women, for children and youth, and for groups in vulnerable situations.

Section II presents a few examples of the way girls are affected by broader programs, and then discusses the question of France's overall commitment to integrating gender into its development policy.

A. A population that falls between the cracks

1. Adolescent girls: neither children...

Because of this in-between position, young girls are often included in programs aimed at children, on the one hand, or at women, on the other.

The issue of schooling must be addressed first. Goal Two of the Millennium Development Goals is "Achieve universal primary education." Christian Barrier and Jacques Marchand, who are in charge of the AFD's educational projects, have noted major progress in basic education, but have admitted that the "left-out 10 percent" is the greatest challenge. "One of the major issues now is to take young girls and vulnerable groups into account," they note. "These are a blind spot in development policy." France belongs to the Fast Track Initiative¹⁵. One of the three new directions that were approved in May 2011 was the consideration of girls who are not in school. Of the 130 million young people worldwide who are not in school, 70% are girls.¹⁶ Julia Napoli, in charge of educational issues at the French foreign ministry, explains, "The goal is to identify girls who are not in school, discover why they are not in school, and find solutions that will allow them to go back to school, with a special focus on secondary schooling and on adolescents." After years of emphasizing children, educational policy is beginning to concentrate on the next age group.

Girls in vulnerable situations are also affected by French programs that combat violence. The French foreign ministry's program for protecting children in armed conflicts in six countries (Uganda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Sudan, and Chad) advocates for a ban on recruitment of children; responsibility for these children; their return to employment; and follow-up psychological and social care for them. "There are certainly indicators linked to girls, because they have specific needs," remarks Nordine Drici, head for human rights at the foreign ministry's Center for Rule of Law. "Girls are not even half of the program, but there are some, and they are taken care of both from the psychological and social point of view and from the employment, social and economic aspects."

15. A worldwide group effort launched in 2002 that aims at attaining Millennium Development Goal Two, primary schooling for all. France has committed 50 million euros to it between 2010 and 2012.

16. Human Rights Watch, *Promises Broken: An Assessment of Children's Rights on the 10th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 2009, www.hrw.org/campaigns/crp/promises/education.html.

A task force run by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs was set up in May 2011 to work on gender violence at school in French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa. The task force is concerned with all girls who go to school, but statistics on secondary schooling shed light on the particular difficulties of adolescent girls. Continuing this initiative, France has given three million euros to UNICEF in Africa to create programs in West Africa in 2012 that will fight against violence committed against girls in the school environment.

2. ... nor adults.

Girls are also sometimes involved in broader programs dedicated to women. For example, the French foreign ministry funds a program in six countries (Mali, Niger, Cameroon, Jordan, Algeria and Morocco) against violence towards women, with a budget of 1.5 million euros. There is no emphasis on adolescents, as all age groups are concerned. But there is a focus on women in prison or in conflict with the law, so young girls are potentially affected. Nordine Drici adds that in Mali there is a program with local associations that fights against excision.

Girls are also often included in sexual and reproductive health programs, because these concern any woman of childbearing age (see *below*).

On the question of economic independence for women, the foreign ministry runs the Priority Solidarity Fund for Mobilizing Women (FSP), called "Gender and Economy, Women as Agents of Development," in seven West African countries. Unfortunately, as Pauline Chabbert explains, "Young women are often invisible. African social organization and age hierarchies mean that older women are in charge. They have completed their work as mothers and now take political responsibility, become heads of networks, heads of cooperatives, talk to the international donors. Obviously there is less access to women who are working."

Asking about girls in broader programs for women's rights leads to the question of how gender is taken into account in French development policy. It is true that there are programs dedicated to women in certain vulnerable situations; but what about France's overall gender strategy, one that would lead to durable change in relations between men and women?

B. In French development policy, gender is marginal

1. The strategic framework

France's commitment is guided by the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, which France ratified in 1983; by the 1995 Beijing Declaration; the Millennium Development Goals of the year 2000, whose third goal is "Promote gender equality and empower women"; and the European Commission's 2007 communiqué on "Equality between men and women and the emancipation of women in cooperation and development."

Other strategic documents for French policy include:

- The framework document "*Coopération au développement, une vision française*," which states that "male-female equality in access to education, social and health services, employment, property, and financial services, but also to all levels of government, is an indispensable requirement for the political and economic enrichment of all societies."¹⁷
- *La stratégie de la gouvernance démocratique* [Strategy of democratic rule], which states that "developing respect for human rights and male-female equity must be one of the principles that inspires our action in cooperation, whatever the region of the world."¹⁸
- The *Document d'Orientation Stratégique* [Document on Strategic Direction] on "Gender," prepared by the foreign ministry's *Direction générale de la Coopération et du Développement* (DgCiD) in 2007 in consultation with many of those working in the field, especially local associations. The gender strategy aims to "bring about profound and durable changes in relations between men and women so that the rights and fundamental liberties of both sexes are respected" and to "achieve more efficiency, relevance and permanence in development policy and programs."¹⁹ Work toward this goal is in three areas: political advocacy; a horizontal approach; and specific action.

It is to be noted that not one of these texts alludes specifically to girls. What is happening at ground level?

2. Implementation

a) Evaluation of the strategic directions document on "Gender"

The strategic directions document on "Gender" is currently being evaluated by the Observatoire de la parité entre les femmes et les hommes [a French government institution that examines male-female political parity], through questionnaires and hearings. Although our report, published in 2012, cannot pretend to be a substitute for the future conclusions of the Observatoire's study, it is still possible to point out three main impediments to the implementation of gender strategy in French development policy, namely:

¹⁷ *Stratégie 2011, Coopération au développement : une vision française*, Ministère des Affaires étrangères et européennes, Direction générale de la mondialisation, du développement et des partenariats, Paris, 2011, p. 36.

¹⁸ *Stratégie gouvernance de la coopération française*, Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Sous-direction de la gouvernance démocratique, édition 2007, p. 10.

¹⁹ *Genre, Document d'Orientation Stratégique*, Paris, Ministère des Affaires étrangères et européennes, 2008, p. 8.

b) The place of gender at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the AFD

It is worth asking how much legitimacy is given to the issue of gender within French institutions. In the foreign ministry, gender issues are directed by Pauline Chabbert. Formerly she worked in the division of Health and Human Development, in a position with no horizontal reach. Recently she was named *Chargée de mission* to the Director of Global Public Goods at foreign ministry. At the AFD, Jean-Michel Mignot, Environmental and social expert at the *Cellule d'Appui Environnemental et Social* (CAES), who is in charge of gender issues there, explains, "We are a small, rather new group. So managing a general policy toward gender at the AFD while working at CAES could be confusing. I prefer to focus on projects that come through CAES and then see if women are specifically affected by these projects. This will then have an indirect effect on the AFD's general policy. To summarize, the AFD does not really have a specific gender policy. Instead it has a very strong policy of combating discrimination of every kind."

c) Gender, just one more "problem"

It appears that to many institutions, as well as to some French NGOs belonging to Coordination Sud (the national development NGO platform), gender is just one more constraint to consider in their development programs. Jean-Michel Mignot of the AFD expresses it like this. "You have what I call a cluster of problems: environmental problems; social problems of vulnerable populations and those who suffer discrimination; gender; accessibility, etc. This means that each time you add something, it is one more responsibility for the person in charge." Although the gender has become a principal indicator in choosing which projects are eligible for financing by the NGO Partnership Directorate (DPO) of the AFD, this is not necessarily appreciated by some NGOs. There is noticeable reluctance on both sides.

d) Anti-discrimination measures versus voluntary measures

Another issue is that there is a qualitative jump between an absence of active discrimination against women and effective programs that take gender into account, for example by using sex-specific indicators. Jean-Michel Mignot speaks of "projects where women are not blocked from access to progress. But they are simply not offered the possibility. There is really a gap."

All these factors are obstacles to including young girls in programs. Yet, looking at the problem from another point of view, the issue of girls could open the door to a better integration of gender in decision-making. In the Muskoka framework – the Initiative on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health launched by the G8 in June 2010 in Muskoka, Canada – the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs insisted that UN Women be one of the partner institutions. International cooperation is very compartmentalized, and it was necessary to show the advantage of working with UN Women on health. France established a link between women's rights and women's health via the question of marriage and pregnancy. Raising the legal age of marriage for girls can reduce early pregnancies, with their higher maternal and child mortality.

Young girls in vulnerable situations are not yet formally viewed as a separate population by French development policy. This invisibility can be explained partly by the inclusion of girls in other, larger groups, and by hindrances to a better integration of gender; but it is also because of the limited transparency of French development policy.



III. A lack of transparency in French development policy, which limits the consideration of the situation of young girls in vulnerable situations

French policy decisions take place with a European and international multilateral background. Because of this, policy is divided and diluted and also becomes less flexible. This influences both the consideration of girls and the visibility of effective actions to help them.

A. Division and dilution

1. The distribution of aid among those working in the area of French cooperation

France's cooperation for development involves, among others, the ministries (several departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of the Interior; of the Environment; of Health and so on), the AFD, local communities, NGOs, etc. Because of this variety it is almost impossible to identify every program that helps girls. There is also no exact data on the overall budget allocated to girls. Moreover, as girls are included in several different areas of intervention, it is hard to measure how many girls are being helped without the risk of duplication of data.

2. Diminishing public development aid to international organizations

This lack of transparency is accentuated by the evaporation of French government aid to international organizations. Patrice Debré, Ambassador for the Fight Against HIV/AIDS, acknowledges that young girls are “certainly a population at risk; but the prevention of this risk to girls depends a great deal on multilateral aid models in general. This means that prevention depends on requests from nations to the Global Fund; on calls for proposals for the medications market to UNITAID; and on the supply and demand of researchers responding to calls for projects. Demand comes from different strategies, and we need to ensure that these strategies are complementary.”

France also acts bilaterally and multilaterally, for example with the Muskoka initiative, to which France agreed to commit 500 million euros between 2011 and 2015. Gilles Landrison, in charge of this initiative within the foreign ministry, explains, “In the follow-up to Muskoka, we have set up programs to strengthen health systems as well as to fight against maternal mortality, along with WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women. What is new about this partnership is that at a very early stage we had all these agencies of the United Nations system work together so that as many areas as possible could be covered in a coordinated way.” Development policy is more cooperative, but development funds are also now harder to track.

B. Limited room to maneuver

1. Sociocultural hindrances

“The problem with gender at AFD is that we are trying to do too many things at once, what with the internal capacity of the AFD, internal acceptance [of gender] at AFD, and the acceptance, capability, and knowledge of our client [on the subject of gender]. And that is extremely complicated,” notes Jean-Michel Mignot. Acceptance is an important challenge. The concept of taking girls into account can come up against sociocultural resistance, both on the French side and on the foreign side. The legitimacy of France’s position on this issue can be called into question by its partners.

Moreover, French men and women who work in development do not necessarily have any direct relationship with those in charge of the programs that are financed. “When you are a development bank, you have to understand that you have one more intermediary between you and the actual project,” points out Mignot. “And afterwards, there are still various possibilities. You might sign a contract with someone who himself is going to sign other contracts to make someone sign even more contracts. You have this whole chain that is a little hard to understand. As far as social responsibility is concerned, we have the good old dilemma of subcontractors: how do you manage the suppliers when you are in our position?” In the course of 2012 a training project will be set up within the AFD to supply advocacy information on gender for project directors so that they can respond to some of these questions. Likewise, the foreign ministry is planning for gender training to be given to new French diplomatic appointees in 2012.

2. Increased harmonization of aid

It is more and more difficult to understand French public aid for development without an overall picture of European public aid. Since the extension of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the new philosophy of cooperation is leading to increased harmonization of aid among EU members. There are frameworks for cooperation in the various sectors, such as health, education, gender, etc., and for each of these, the donors meet around the table.

In 2007, the Council of the European Union published its conclusions on a “Code of Conduct on Complementarity and the Division of Labor in Development Policy.” In order to limit the fragmentation of aid, EU member states committed themselves to confine their aid to each country to three sectors (with an exception for higher education and research). In 2008, the Council launched the Fast Track Initiative on the division of labor. In 30 beneficiary nations, mainly LDCs (least developed countries, which have little ability to manage a large number of donors), an EU member state must act as facilitator for the aid. For example, France is the facilitator in Mali, where eight EU member states have aid missions. The EU’s Operational Framework on Trade Effectiveness was published in 2009. We are currently near the end of the 2007-2013 plan. Discussions are taking place on how to put these intentions into effect for the next plan (2014-2020).

In this new situation, France has had to withdraw from certain sectors that involve young girls directly or indirectly (health, education, gender) without being in any way less committed. Michèle Ooms, head of the AFD's health and social protection division, says, "Many countries do not choose the health sector as the place to concentrate French aid because of the large sums given by the Global Fund. These governments will say, 'Health is already being taken care of, so it's better to use French money elsewhere.' This explains why France has withdrawn from the health sector in some countries where it used to cooperate a great deal." For example, the AFD does not work in health care in Benin because health was not the French sector of concentration. However, as Benin was one of 18 countries in the Muskoka list of beneficiaries, the AFD is currently appraising a health project there. Finally, the lack of access to matrixes and precise data on the distribution of sectors by country limits the visibility of actions by France and its partners in favor of girls.

Conclusion

At the end of 2011, girls in vulnerable situations, although not completely absent from French development policy, were dealt with only incidentally, by their inclusion in broader programs. This near-invisibility is explained by the fact that this population had not been thought of as separate until now. This is a *de facto* impediment to a specific strategy for girls.

Officials interviewed for this report had diverse profiles, but it was noticeable that officials in junior posts, especially women, seemed more receptive and readier to become involved in sharing information on the subject of girls, although of course this does not mean there were no exceptions. The higher up in the hierarchy, the more the responsible positions were held by older men, who for the moment show little interest in the issue of girls. Some officials refused to see the author of this report, referring her to a lower level. These refusals might be justified by overbooked schedules; but they also demonstrate that the political will to face this innovative subject is still feeble.

The outlook for the future

The beginning of 2012 was marked by the establishment of a task force on girls at the Direction Générale de la Mondialisation [General Directorate for Globalization]. After the French presidential and legislative elections, a new ministerial team will be named. Girls' issues must not suffer during the interim period, and must remain an important question for those responsible for French cooperation policy.

There are many prospects for work on the theme of young girls. For example:

- Follow-up to the Muskoka initiative on maternal and child health. Like several others interviewed, Michèle Ooms emphasized that "Muskoka is truly an opportunity we must seize. We need to give it the priority it deserves."
- International commitments in favor of the Millennium Development Goals, especially in education.
- At the political level, an emphasis on girls in French speeches and declarations at European and international institutions, especially the United Nations and its task force on adolescent girls, the World Bank, etc.
- At the personnel level, training and consciousness-raising: training of AFD's *chargés d'affaires* in 2012; the foreign ministry's addition of a module on gender, complemented by an online training project, to the training of new appointees in the diplomatic corps in the course of 2012. The goal is to form a network of people focused on gender.
- At the AFD, participation in countries' strategies for development of secondary education; and strategic interventions in the health sector from 2011-2015. One of the three main areas of strategic intervention aims to assist Sub-Saharan Africa in its demographic transition, especially through sexual and reproductive health and family planning.
- The possible creation of financial tools such as a FISONG (*Facilité d'innovation sectorielle des ONG*, or NGO sectorial innovation facility, a lending program for NGOs) for girls.

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Recommendations

Take girls and adolescents into account for a more just and efficient development policy.

1. MAKE GIRLS VISIBLE IN THE STATISTICS.
2. INCLUDE THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF GIRLS.
3. SET UP A GENDER-SENSITIVE BUDGET.
4. INCREASE FINANCING FOR BOY-GIRL EQUALITY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.
5. COMBAT THE MARRIAGE OF MINORS AND OTHER VIOLENCE.
6. PROMOTE THE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS OF GIRLS.
7. INTEGRATE GIRLS INTO POLICY IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST HIV / AIDS.
8. GIVE GIRLS ACCESS TO FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION.
9. PROMOTE GIRLS' ACCESS TO AN OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED STATUS (BIRTH CERTIFICATES AND IDENTITY CARDS).
10. STRENGTHEN GIRLS' ECONOMIC POWER.
11. ALLOW GIRLS TO TAKE CHARGE AND MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS CONCERNING THEIR LIVES.
12. INVOLVE THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY IN THIS PROCESS OF SOCIAL CHANGE.

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