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The Girl-Child*

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Strategic Objectives:

- L1. Eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl-child*
- L2. Eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls*
- L3. Promote and protect the rights of the girl-child and increase awareness of her needs and potential*
- L4. Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training*
- L5. Eliminate discrimination against girls in health and nutrition*
- L6. Eliminate the economic exploitation of child labour and protect young girls at work*
- L7. Eradicate violence against the girl-child*
- L8. Promote the girl-child's awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life.*
- L9. Strengthen the role of the family in improving the status of the girl-child.*

INTRODUCTION

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Republic Act (RA) 7610 (Special Protection of Children against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act) define a child as any person below the age of 18. Children constitute approximately 40% of the Philippine population (estimated at 41 million in 2015), around 20 million of whom are girl-children (Philippines Statistics Office-National Statistical Coordination Board [PSA-NSCB], 2015). The rights of girl-children in the Philippines are protected by a

* This report was written by Minerva C. Cabiles, Camila Inarra and Shiela Carreon (Save the Children); and May Baez (Civil Society Coalition on the Convention on the Rights of the Child), with contributions from the following groups or organizations: Child Hope Asia, Children's Rehabilitation Center, Children Talk to Children About the UNCRC (C2C) Project, Educo/Intervida, Civil Society Coalition on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Philippines Against Child Trafficking, Philippine Coalition on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Plan International, SLU-Sunflower Children's Center, Salinlahi Alliance for Children's Concerns, Save the Children, and World Vision. Jeanne Frances Illo (WSAP) reviewed and edited the paper.

progressive legal framework on children's rights as well as women's rights, the Philippines having ratified the CRC and its two Optional Protocols (on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict [OPAC] and on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography [OPSC]) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The CRC covers the whole range of civil and political, social, economic and political rights of all girls and boys. As a sector, children enjoy the protection of a relatively progressive legal framework on children's rights.

However, despite these guarantees, girls and boys still do not fully enjoy their rights due to factors that range from legal gaps and weak implementation of existing laws, to cultural and social barriers. Girls experience multiple discrimination, having a low status in society not only because of their sex but also of their age. Specific groups of girls are also further marginalized on the basis of their ethnicity, economic status, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion, disability and specific circumstances. Being at the root of the woman's life-cycle, the girl-child's experience of abuse and discrimination is carried into her adult life and further reinforces the intergenerational cycle. While girls' rights are also women's rights, because of their age, they have needs and interests that are different from those of adults, which is why provisions that may be available for women may not suffice. Their limited experience and power, and the lack of enabling conditions also limit their capacity to claim their rights and demand accountability.

Poverty and inequity are also key factors that impede the rights fulfilment of girls and boys. Children are among the top three poorest sectors next to fisherfolk and farmers, with a poverty incidence rate of 36.5% in 2012 (higher than the national poverty incidence among families of 19.7% in the same year). This rate has not changed since 2000 (PSA, 2012). Children are expected to continue to face income poverty with the frequency and severity of natural calamities (Reyes, Tabuga, Asis, & Mondez, 2014, p. ix). In 2009, children living in extreme poverty numbered to about 5.9 million, representing 16% of the children population. Children also suffer multiple dimensions of deprivation that are not limited to income and hunger, but also include access to water and sanitation, information, and health and education services, among others. Poverty also has long-term impacts on children's physical and mental development (Reyes et al., 2014, p. 1). Thus, the various forms of discrimination, marginalization and violence discussed in the succeeding report are also mostly taking place in the context of poverty and deprivation, with the particular characteristic of an urban or rural context.

ASSESSMENT OF GOVERNMENT COMPLIANCE

There are international instruments, laws and policies adopted within the past 20 years that protect girl-children from discrimination. The Philippines ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008 and the Convention against Torture in 2012. Over the past 20 years, the Philippine Congress has also passed key legislation aimed at preventing and

addressing abuse and discrimination faced by children, especially girls. These include the Juvenile Justice Welfare Act of 2006 as Amended and the Anti-Torture Act of 2009, which protects the right of children in conflict with the law (CICL). The Supreme Court also adopted the Revised Rule on Children in Conflict with the Law (A.M. No. 02-1-18-SC) in 2009 to ensure that the rights of CICL who come into the court systems are protected, their participation in legal proceedings are facilitated and their special needs are considered.

Strategic Objective L1: Eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl-child

Measures to prohibit discrimination in schools are also in place. Section 15 of the Department of Education (DepEd) Order No. 40, Series of 2012 prohibits and penalizes discrimination against children, which includes by reason of age, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability and other circumstances, including being pregnant. As also cited in the Government Report, Section 13(c) of the Magna Carta of Women and its IRR specifically states that female students cannot be “expelled, dismissed, suspended, refused or denied admission, or forced to take a leave of absence in any educational institution because of pregnancy outside of marriage.” Furthermore, in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), the regional government enacted in 2013 the Magna Carta for Children in ARMM (Muslim Mindanao Autonomy Act, No. 162), which includes provisions for the protection against discrimination of children in indigenous communities and promotion of the rights and welfare of children in situations of armed conflict.

Despite these legal mandates, girls and boys still face abuse and discrimination because of poor implementation and monitoring of these laws and policies. For instance, despite the adoption of the Juvenile Justice Welfare Act, there are still no clear diversion and rehabilitation programs at the local level for children who are involved in crimes because of the strong resistance from and lack of capacity to implement the law among local government units. The Philippine National Police blames the law, particularly the provision setting the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR) at 15 for encouraging many young people to commit crimes since they cannot be jailed. Criminal syndicates have also used the law in their favor by employing children to commit illegal activities (Philippine NGO Coalition on the UNCRC, 2012). Criminal syndicates have also reportedly started using younger children in crimes to circumvent the MACR. While this issue mainly involves boys, there are also reports that girls are increasingly being used for crimes because they are less likely to be suspected by law enforcers. To address this issue, some legislators have made attempts to lower the MACR to 12. While these efforts have not succeeded, the existing MACR remains threatened with proposed amendments to the Revised Penal Code (Criminal Code, Book 1)

that include lowering the MACR to 13. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council (JJWC) issued a joint statement in 2014 against this move, asserting that lowering the MACR is not consistent with the CRC; it is discriminatory as criminality is linked to poverty and dysfunctional family; it is against the child's best interest; and will not help solve the juvenile delinquency problem but likely increase the number of younger children who will enter the justice system.

Non-government organizations (NGOs) have also observed instances of discrimination against girls. An NGO implementing programs for street children and CICL claims to have had a hard time finding centers/shelters to which lesbian children can be referred. Centers refuse to take them in for fear that they will influence other girls to become lesbians or that they will have sexual relations with other girls.

The lack of disaggregation of government data by age, sex, ethnicity and disability, among others, has made them invisible in national statistics and local government databases, thereby contributing to make programs and services less responsive to the situation and needs of marginalized children. Moreover, the age disaggregation in national statistics is not consistent with the definition of the child under the CRC and in Philippine laws. There is also a dire lack of documentation of even the most fundamental information about Filipinos with disabilities. Whatever data exist on persons with disabilities are also not disaggregated by sex, age and type of disability.

Strategic Objective L2. Eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls

Harmful traditional practices still prevail and continue to hinder the protection of girls from abuse, violence and discrimination. Among these is the use of physical and humiliating punishment, which is still the most widely used and traditionally accepted way of disciplining girls and boys. It is also a form of violence that impacts on the most number of children. A Pulse Asia perception survey in 2011 reveals that two out of three parents use corporal punishment with their children while a 2005 study reports that 85% of children experience corporal punishment, mostly in the form of spanking (Save the Children, 2005). The study further observes that the physical punishment is usually preceded by verbal castigation, which in the experience of some female children also involves shouting and denigration. Other than the physical pain, children report that they also "feel hurt inside," underscoring the emotional impact of corporal punishment on the dignity and self-esteem of children. Esteban (2006), in a study on the effects of parental verbal abuse on young people, concludes that parental verbal abuse results in the "propensity for confusion, worrying, lack of concentration, thoughts of rejection,

low self-worth, chronic fatigue, and displacement of anger on siblings... [which] suggests a potential risk for transgenerational verbal abuse.”

Existing laws—such as Article 20 of the Family Code, Section 2 of the Implementing Rules and Regulations of RA 7610, and Article 263 of the Revised Penal Code—endorse the use of corporal punishment if “reasonable in manner and moderate in degree,” and are not cruel and excessive. These legal justifications discriminate against girls and boys, denying them equal protection in the law against physical assault. Thus, there is a need to address these gaps through legal reform. A bill prohibiting the use of corporal punishment in all settings, including in the home, and promoting positive discipline remains pending in Congress for the past seven years, as it struggles to get passed in the Senate. In schools, however, corporal punishment has been prohibited through DepEd Order No. 40, which explicitly bans the use of corporal punishment in all elementary and high schools.

Girls from indigenous and Muslim communities are also faced by prospects of early, arranged marriages. Although the minimum age of marriage has been set by law at 18 for both males and females (Article 5 of the Family Code), children continue to be married off way below this age limit, as this is allowed under indigenous customary laws (Sections 15 and 65–70 of the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act) and in the Code of Muslim Personal Laws (Articles 137–159). A study on early marriage in South Central Mindanao (Save the Children, 2013a) reports that in Region 12, the average age of marriage for females is around 13 years due to the practice of *buya*, or giving a baby girl away to a man as repayment for a loan; and marrying a girl to an older man with wealth in order to assure a high dowry (*sunggud*). The same study reveals that 93% of the research respondents believe children should be given the right to decide on their marriage partners and when they will marry. They also shared that they do not want their own children to be married early. Child marriage has been found to have impacts on girls’ health and education, and also exposes them to risks of rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Article 16 (1) to (3) of the Code of Muslim Personal Laws (Presidential Decree No. 1083, issued in 1977), serves as a legal barrier to eliminating this harmful practice. It allows betrothal and marriage of children at age of puberty set at 15 years old, but for girls, they can already contract marriage even earlier than 15 (but not lower than 12 years old) if they have attained puberty. The Women’s Rights Training Program implemented by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has only been somewhat helpful since people still adhere to traditional practices and do not include children in decision making.

There have been some positive steps though to address and/or eliminate early marriage. The Magna Carta of Women includes a provision (Article 19b) that considers the betrothal or marriage of a child as having no legal effect. Efforts at the community level to raise awareness on the issue of early marriage are also gaining ground. The findings of the research on early marriage, when presented to tribal elders and Muslim leaders, have made them

aware of the negative impacts of this practice on girls' well-being. In response, in a stakeholders' forum, 37 tribal leaders representing nine indigenous communities in South Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat provinces signed a joint declaration to end forced marriage and adopt a Child Protection Code (Save the Children, 2013b). A draft ordinance on an amendment to the Provincial Children's Code of South Cotabato endorsed by CSOs, Council of Elders, Muslim leaders, children and the provincial government proposes the prohibition of early marriage among children.

Another tradition among indigenous groups is a form of female circumcision that serves as a rite of passage for young girls aged 5 to 8 years old being practiced among the Yakan tribe of Basilan (Calsalin, 2008). This involves bathing the child, whispering a prayer and scraping the *labia majora* of the female genitalia, and a final prayer. The Yakans believe that this is an appropriate time to "start teaching women regulations and rules in Islam, following the way of life of Prophet Mohammad" (Calsalin, 2008, p. 17). It is also seen as a cleansing process, after which a girl is regarded as dignified and pure enough to participate in religious rituals, and as having the wisdom and readiness for marriage and adult life. Girls who refuse to be circumcised are viewed as unclean, inferior and without wisdom. Men who married circumcised women also viewed the women they married as pure and dignified. The Yakans do not view the practice as harmful since the privacy of the child during the process is protected, there are no effects on health and the physical pain is tolerable. While the research saw no evidence of mental health implications, it underscores the risk of vulvar inflammation, vulvar infection and tetanus among girls. Moreover, the ritual reinforces the symbolism of the female sexual organ and female sexuality as unclean, immoral and undignified, and further devalues the worth of the girl/woman and her sexuality.

Strategic Objective L3. *Promote and protect the rights of the girl child and increase awareness of her needs and potential*

There had been steps taken to promote and raise awareness on the rights of girl children. Prodded by the Beijing Platform for Action, President Fidel V. Ramos signed Proclamation 759 s. 1996 proclaiming the fourth week of March of every year as the "Protection and Gender-Fair Treatment of the Girl Child Week," and mandating the DSWD, through the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC), among others, to review policies and plans related to girl children, develop action plans to improve their status and launch information campaigns to promote their rights and equal opportunities for them. A Sub-Task Force on the Girl Child was formed in 1997 under the CWC, which then formulated the Medium-Term Strategic Framework on the Girl Child (or the Girl Child Plan 2000–2004). This would have ensured concrete action to combat discrimination against girls. The Girl Child Week

has been regularly observed by CWC, with focus on specific themes each year. However, these celebrations are not well known and have not been maximized for public awareness-raising using mass media and social media. There is also little information on the implementation of the Girl Child Plan, its utilization by agencies or local government, or its updating and follow-up. It is also observed that past reports on the Beijing Platform for Action, whether from government or civil society, contained very minimal information particular to girl children. At best, the situation of girls is subsumed within the general discussion of women's and children's situation. This reflects a dearth of age-disaggregated data and information across all sectors, as well as the lack of participation of child-focused government bodies and civil society organizations, and of girl children themselves in the monitoring and review process.

Disasters and conflict are also situations where girl children's needs and concerns have not been highlighted. Post-disaster or post-conflict needs assessments and monitoring hardly account for children's specific needs, much less the specific needs of girls, despite the fact that 41% of affected populations are children, and that they bear the brunt of the impact of these emergency situations. Typhoon Yolanda (internationally known as Typhoon Haiyan), for instance, which made landfall in the Philippines on 8 November 2013, seriously affected an estimated 2.68 million people, of whom around 1.6 million are children (Save the Children, 2014a). The post-disaster needs assessment conducted by government, the United Nations and non-government humanitarian actors identified risks and needs that are specific to children and implemented responses that addressed these needs. However, children had not been asked directly about their needs and suggestions, which is crucial if the response were to become responsive and relevant. An assessment conducted jointly by four international child-focused humanitarian agencies six weeks after Typhoon Yolanda struck was an attempt to consult children directly about their views on their situation and the impact of the typhoon on their lives, their priorities and needs at that time and their suggestions on how to improve the humanitarian response (Save the Children, Plan International, World Vision and United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2013c). The consultations revealed that children have serious concerns and views about the humanitarian situation and the response. Their priorities included rebuilding homes, returning to school, and restoring electricity. They were also found to have helped their families in preparing for the typhoon, such as listening to the news and packing their things, and would like to know how they could prevent and prepare for future events. Some were already involved in the recovery within their families. The consultations also revealed the particular needs of girls. Adolescent girls who were consulted suggested that hygiene kits include more sanitary napkins. In tent cities, adolescent girls want more privacy when they are using the toilets and washing facilities, while adolescent boys suggested more toilets and washing facilities for girls.

A similar rapid assessment focused on child protection was also conducted in Central Mindanao following the Government of the Philippines-Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (GPH-BIFF) armed conflict in late January 2014 (Child Protection Working Group, 2014, pp. 13–14). The assessment report revealed that in sites assessed within Maguindanao and North Cotabato, more girls than boys got separated from their usual caregivers. These findings are also indicated in a rapid assessment report done in the wake of Typhoon Bopha and the Zamboanga Crisis, where cases of separated children were reported. More than half of separated children were below five years old. More girls were also reported to be unaccompanied. There were also reported changes in the behavior of children as an effect of the conflict. For girls, these were sadness, disrespectful behavior within the family, unusual crying and screaming, and unwillingness to go to school. Boys tended to display more aggressive behavior.

The Gender and Development (GAD) budget, equivalent to 5 per cent of the budget of national line agencies and of the internal revenue allotment of local government units, also provides opportunities for specific programs for girl children to be resourced. However, only 0.08% of the budget allocation was used to address the strategic needs of women and girls (Illo et al., 2010). This has been attributed to the lack of technical skills on gender analysis, and a lack of commitment to ensure women and girls are empowered among local government units and line agencies. There has also been no assessment of how the GAD budget is also being used to improve the status of and address the particular strategic needs of girls.

Strategic Objective L4. Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training

This report notes the progress that has been made on improving access to education through stronger policies and increased investments in education as reported in the Government Report and in the section on Women and Education in this NGO report. The Philippines' fifth progress report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs; National Economic Development Authority [NEDA] & United Nation Development Programme [UNDP], 2014, pp. 11–12) reveals that the goal on universal access to primary education is likely to be met, with gradual improvements in net enrolment rates, as discussed in the Women and Education paper. The Kindergarten Act of 2012 also contributed to improving access to kindergarten—now part of the basic education system—which made pre-school for five-year-old girls and boys free, mandatory and compulsory. According to the Education for All (EFA) Report (Education for All [EFA], 2014, p. 6), this resulted in increased net enrolment rate from 55% (School Year [SY] 2010–2011) to 77% (SY 2012–2013). Gross enrolment rate for kindergarten also increased from 76% to 103% for the same period. All three reports also show that girls continue to outper-

form boys in most of the key education performance indicators such as net enrollment, cohort survival and literacy rates.

In relation to early childhood development, the EFA report (2014, p. 15) claims that only 90% of all barangays in the country have their own day care center, with the number of day care centers increasing from 51,797 in 2011 to 53,436 in 2013. However, the report admits that only 19.9% of the target population are reached by these centers. Thus, with the increasing population, more than one day-care center needs to be set up in each barangay.

There were also efforts to make education more accessible to marginalized groups of boys and girls. To improve access to education and learning outcomes for children from indigenous communities, the K-to-12 curriculum includes the Mother Tongue-Based, Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), which requires the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction and as a subject of learning, serving also as a tool for expression of one's culture and way of life. As of 2013, teacher guides and learning materials have been developed for 19 major languages (Save the Children, 2014b).

However, high dropout rates (reflected in low cohort survival rates) and quality of education (reflected in low scores in the National Achievement Tests [NAT]) remain to be major issues. The MDG report admits that there is low and medium probability for meeting the targets for completion rate and cohort survival rate, respectively (NEDA 2014, p. 12). Children in marginalized communities, especially boys, are faced with many barriers to completing their education. A study on the impact of urban relocation on children (John J. Carroll Institute on Church and Social Issues [JJCICSI], 2014, pp. 13–24) reveals that going to school can be an ordeal for girls and boys whose families have been relocated to communities 30–50 kilometers from Metro Manila. The children report that they have to walk long distances and spend a lot of money for transportation just to get to school, as primary and secondary schools are still not found within relocations sites. Girls especially are exposed to risks, as they have to walk along dark streets to get to the highway to commute to school.

In one relocation site in Bulacan, classrooms overflowed because of the influx of transferees from among the relocated students, indicating that the receiving schools themselves are not prepared for the relocation. Children also report that they experience being bullied by their new classmates, and being called names. Transfer of school records is also not coordinated and facilitated between the schools of origin and the receiving schools, so that parents had to attend to the transfer of records on their own, incurring transportation costs in the process. There are cases where children have to stop schooling for several days while their school records are being transferred. Relocation also often takes place in the middle of the school year, disrupting children's schooling.

Natural disasters and conflict also pose a threat to girls' access to schools. In areas affected by Typhoon Yolanda, a drop in school attendance rates

among girls—ranging from 3% to as high as 78%—was observed, mainly due to the unavailability of undamaged schools, need to improve physical safety, and the lack of teachers (Save the Children, et al., 2014). In the case of armed conflict, schools are also subject to attack by armed groups, and are sometimes damaged in the crossfire between armed groups and the military. NGOs working in conflict areas in Central Mindanao shared that indigenous people's alternative schools have been subject to attack, and used for encampment by government armed forces. Female students are exposed to risks, with some experiencing harassment from members of the armed forces camped in their schools, resulting in the suspension of classes or temporary closure of the school. Just recently, the ongoing conflict between government military forces and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) has resulted in the displacement of an estimated 7,000 children (DepEd ARMM, 2015). These children are currently out of school, as classes are still suspended.

A bill pending in Congress, called the Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Bill (House Bill 5285), aims to address the particular needs of girls and boys before, during and after natural disasters. It has provisions that would ensure continuous access to education by children despite being in an emergency situation. If passed, the law will ensure the prompt resumption of educational services for children. It prescribes a specific time frame (30 days) for using schools as evacuation centers, and only those spaces within the school premises that are not used as classrooms. The proposed law would also require regular monitoring of the condition of structures of temporary or semi-permanent structures used as learning spaces to make sure that these are safe for children.

The official Beijing +20 Report (Philippine Commission on Women [PCW], 2014) mentions the availability of special education programs and facilities to improve access to education of children with disabilities. Section 16 of the Magna Carta of Disabled Persons ensures funding for special education programs for all children and persons with various forms of disability, as well as non-formal education programs, while Section 21(g) provides for day care services for pre-school aged children with disabilities. Despite this, education remains elusive for girls and boys with disabilities. Around two million children with disabilities aged 5–14 years old do not have access to education. Although a high number of barangays with day care centers has been reported, these facilities are able to reach a mere 3% of children with disabilities aged 4–6 years. There is a vicious cycle of very restricted opportunities for education, community involvement, and employment that keep girls with disabilities isolated, powerless and fully dependent on their families. Even the already very limited access to education is also now being threatened by private schools that are lobbying against a bill proposing the use of the Filipino Sign Language as the national sign language. Private schools are insisting on the use of artificial sign systems, and the oral approach (prohibiting the use of sign language). This undermines the explicit advocacy of the national Philippine Federation of the Deaf for the cultural and linguistic iden-

tity of the Filipino deaf community and affects the education of girls with disabilities.

Not just access, quality of education is also an issue. The EFA report notes that NAT scores for both elementary and secondary levels did not reach the mean percentage score of 75% targeted by EFA (EFA, 2014, p. 56). As of SY 2012–2013, elementary level NAT is 68.88%, and much lower at 51.41% for secondary level (EFA, 2014, p. 56). In relation to ECD, of the 55% of young children attending pre-school, more than half are not ready to be in Grade 1.

In a consultation, girls express that education is an issue that is “deeply important to them.” They want to “make the most of the opportunities that school provides” (The Girl Effect Project, 2013, Slide 11).

Strategic Objective L5. Eliminate discrimination against girls in health and nutrition

Early pregnancy is one of the key health issues affecting girls that warrant immediate attention. The 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality (YAFS) Survey points to the increasing incidence of pregnancy among adolescent girls (Marquez, 2014). The rise in early pregnancy rates has been attributed to the increasing number of adolescents having sexual intercourse, and the low usage of contraceptive and other forms of protection. There are also data showing that girls who get pregnant are getting increasingly younger. Data from the National Statistics Office (NSO) show that pregnancy among Filipino girls below 20 years old has increased by 65 per cent in 2000–2010 (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2012). Studies also show that infant mortality rate is 30% higher for infants born to mothers aged 15 to 19 years than for women 20 years or older. In the 2011 Family Health Survey, childbirth was also found to be increasing among girls aged 15–19 across the country (UNFPA, 2012). Apart from the increase in maternal mortality rates from 162 in 2006 to 221 in 2011, thereby increasing the likelihood of not achieving the MDG target on maternal health as raised in the official Beijing +20 Report, even more alarming is that adolescent mothers account for 20 per cent of all maternal deaths, with 1,000 of these deaths being abortion-related.

Interviews conducted in 2012 by children’s groups in urban poor communities in Cavite and Pasay City reveal that almost all of the pregnant girls they interviewed got pregnant at 15 to 17 years old (Children Talk to Children about the UNCRC [C2C], 2012). These girls shared that pregnancy affected their physical appearance and self-confidence, and forced them to drop out of school. (Pregnancy was also cited earlier by JJCICSI [2014] as one of the reasons for dropping out among girls.) Most of the girls interviewed revealed that they feel they are not loved and cared for as much as before they got pregnant. The majority of the children also claimed that the only

thing they know about reproductive health is the use of condoms and pills, which they did not use at all.

The high incidence of teen pregnancy has also been attributed to the lack of comprehensive sexuality education and limited access to adolescent-friendly reproductive health services. The Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health (RPRH) Act of 2012 (RA 10354), which improves adolescents' access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, including sexuality education in the public school system, might help prevent early pregnancy. However, contrary to the claim of the official Beijing +20 Report that the RPRH Law "guarantees universal access to all methods of family planning, fertility management, sexuality education, and maternal care," Section 7 of the law actually contradicts this guarantee of universal access by denying persons below 18 years access to information and access to family planning services without parental consent, unless they are already a parent or has had a miscarriage. This provision is seen as a barrier to preventing early pregnancy especially as most Filipino parents do not discuss sex and reproductive health with their children, much less knowingly send them to the health center for information. Sexuality education (age- and development-appropriate reproductive health education) is also integrated into the school curriculum but its teaching is limited to adolescents in public schools, and will be optional in private schools.

For many years prior to the passage of the RPRH Law, NGOs have been implementing programs to prevent teen pregnancy by improving adolescents' access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information and services, building young people's life skills and supporting youth participation in SRH programs. The Family Planning Organization of the Philippines (FPOP) has been implementing programs to increase young people's access to SRH services through peer education sessions, mobilization and capacity building of youth volunteers, organizing youth core groups, implementing youth leadership programs and building partnerships with local government units. Since 2005, the youth participation program has evolved into youth participation in reproductive health governance and policy advocacy. In 2012, the Department of Health Center for Health Development-National Capital Region, the National Youth Commission, the Council for the Welfare of Children, the National Anti-Poverty Commission Women and Youth Basic Sectors, the Quezon City Health Department, WomanHealth Philippines, Save the Children and other CSOs formed the Task Force *Batang Ina* to raise the alarm on early pregnancy, especially among young adolescents aged 10–14, and collaborate to develop and implement programs to address this. The Task Force has conducted focus group discussions and consultations among adolescents and CSOs, including a national children's summit on early pregnancy, to contribute to building evidence on early pregnancy, strengthen the child-rights perspective and girl-focus in the analysis of adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) issues, and strengthen government and civil

society collaboration in implementing ASRH programs within the National Capital Region.

In humanitarian settings, girls' health needs are not readily addressed. Typhoon Yolanda severely affected and weakened the health services delivery systems within the affected regions. The super typhoon damaged around 82% of the health facilities, with most of these facilities rendered non-functioning (Save the Children, 2014c, p. 26). This resulted in 1.1 million people, including 163,000 children under the age of 5 years, left to contend with sub-optimal primary health services. Specific risks for children and young people include high risk of disease due to a range of factors, including disruption of health treatments, limited access to safe and clean water, reduced access to adequate nutritious food and breakdown of disease surveillance systems; moderate to acute malnutrition; and psychosocial trauma, including traumatic reactions to high winds and from having experienced the storm and witnessed deaths and destruction (Save the Children et al., 2014).

Because nurses could not provide sufficient care at night due to the absence of electricity, several babies were reported to have died of hypothermia and hypoglycemia, which are normally treatable (Save the Children, 2014c, pp. 28–29). Mothers were also found to breastfeed their babies less after the typhoon and tend to prefer milk formula. Some mothers reported that they produce less milk because of the stress from the typhoon. One health practitioner noted that this could be attributed to the lack of information given to mothers on techniques to increase milk production.

In view of all these, the interventions implemented by humanitarian actors in Yolanda-affected areas at the early recovery and rehabilitation phases already included health services that specifically target adolescent girls and boys. These included the setting up of adolescent friendly spaces, menstrual hygiene promotion and ASRH information and services for high-risk adolescents, as well as mobile clinics providing essential health services.

Strategic Objective L6. Eliminate the economic exploitation of child labor and protect young girls at work

The past ten years saw the emergence of a stronger policy framework for protecting girls and boys against sexual and commercial exploitation, and trafficking. Among the key laws passed were the Anti-Child Labor Law (An Act Providing for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor and Affording Stronger Protection for the Working Child) in 2003, the Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2012, and the Anti-Child Pornography Act of 2009. These laws have spurred the development of national strategies and plans specific to child labor, child pornography and trafficking, as well as, the setting up of permanent coordinating mechanisms among relevant agencies at national down to the barangay level. There have been combined

efforts among government agencies, law enforcement, local government units and CSOs to implement the law and extend services to victims.

Despite these efforts, children especially girls, continue to fall victim to exploitation. The 2011 National Survey on Children reveals that 3.21 million children are engaged in child labor, 93% of which are in hazardous work, primarily in the informal sector and about 60% in the agricultural sector (US Department of Labor [US DOL], 2013). Girls are mainly exposed to trafficking to urban areas for domestic work and prostitution/pornography. There are also reports that boys are increasingly trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation, especially pornography. A mini-research conducted by children in Caloocan reveals that more girls are also now engaged in scavenging in the streets even during night time, exposing them to many risks (C2C, 2012).

A round-table discussion on the situation of girl children among CSOs generated anecdotal reports on the nature of girls' involvement in hazardous work (Save the Children, 2014d). Many girls are now subject of cyber pornography, even in impoverished rural areas, with their families considering it as a source of income. Some indigenous livelihood such as gardening in the Northern provinces of Luzon includes young girls in the work force. Gardening work on top of household chores can take more than eight hours and would not leave time for girls to review school lessons. In armed conflict areas, armed groups recruit girls, among others, to do auxiliary work for the combatants, like washing dishes, doing laundry and running errands. The Children's Rehabilitation Center documented two cases of girls recruited into the Civilian Auxiliary Forces Geographical Unit in 2010. World Vision has observed that child labor in sugarcane plantations is intergenerational. Most parents work in sugarcane farms; many young adults who were child workers before return to work in sugarcane farms and some of their children are currently working in sugarcane farms as well. In relation to girls with disabilities, many of them in both urban and rural areas are bound by unpaid work, often in servitude to other family members in their households, including female members who have no disabilities. The CSOs also observed that data are lacking on girls in the informal economy, specifically on the types of work they are engaged in and the risks involved.

The Domestic Workers Act (or *Kasambahay* Law) is generally considered a landmark piece of legislation for empowering women in domestic work. However, it is not consistent with the standards of the ILO and CRC, as it allows the employment of girl children aged 15 to 17 years, despite domestic work being regarded internationally as among the worst forms of child labor. Based on the recent Philippine Child Labor Survey, nearly 600,000 child laborers aged 5 to 14 years old are in the service industry and that 373,000 children work in private households. The ILO has identified a number of hazards to which domestic workers are particularly vulnerable and the reasons it may be considered in some cases a worst form of child labor. Some of the most common risks children face in domestic service include: long and

tiring working days; use of toxic chemicals; carrying heavy loads; handling dangerous items such as knives, axes and hot pans; insufficient or inadequate food and accommodation, and humiliating or degrading treatment including physical and verbal violence, and sexual abuse (World Vision, 2013). The risks are compounded when a child lives in the household where he or she works as a domestic worker. These hazards need to be seen in association with the denial of fundamental rights of the child, such as access to education and health care, the right to rest, leisure, play and recreation, and the right to be cared for and to have regular contact with her or his parents and peers. These factors can have an irreversible physical, psychological and moral impact on the development, health and well-being of a child.

Strategic Objective L7. Eradicate violence against the girl-child

The Philippines enacted a number of laws and policies that strengthen the protection of girls against violence. Aside from the laws stated in the previous section, there are also the Anti-Violence against Women and Their Children Act (Anti-VAWC Act) and the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013. The Department of Education also issued DepEd Order No. 40, which prohibits corporal punishment and other forms of violence against children within the schools, and requires all schools to adopt a child protection policy and set up child protection committees tasked with developing and implementing prevention programs, and monitoring the implementation of the policy. The effective implementation of these laws and policies, however, remains a challenge. Not all communities have established Local Councils for the Protection of Children (LCPC), which is the primary structure to implement programs to prevent violence against children, and monitor and respond to violence including gender-based violence perpetrated against girls. The absence of active LCPCs serves as barrier for girl-children survivors of violence, including trafficked children, to accessing services and justice for their victimization. In 2010, the Department of Interior and Local Government reported that barangay councils for the protection of children (BCPCs), had been established in 84% of all barangays nationwide (DILG, 2010). However, only 52% of these were considered at ideal or mature status based on the tool for assessing functionality. This means that only these BCPCs had complied with at least 51% of the requirements for a fully functional local CPC (that is, budget allocation, plans and programs and accomplishment reports). Only 15% were assessed to have attained at least 80% of all requirements (ideal state), and only 51% were likely to have significant programs. The worst part is that, after the elections in 2013, most of these structures would have been dissolved or have become non-operational especially in areas where there was a change in the political leadership. With the three-year term of office of local officials, LCPCs constantly face the issue of sustainability. This report failed to access more recent data on the functionality of the LCPCs and BCPCs.

There are also gaps in existing laws that make girls and boys vulnerable to abuse. The bill prohibiting corporal punishment against children, which if passed will remove all legal justifications for its use, has been pending for the past three congresses. The Anti-Rape Law of 1997 has retained the minimum age for statutory rape at 12. In the 55 child protection units in the country, the total reported cases of sexual abuse of girls aged 0–17 in 2012 was at 3,411 (Child Protection Unit Network, 2013). Consistently since 1997, the cases reported for the age group 13–15 years old had registered the highest number. The data from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) show this same pattern. In 2013, the DSWD handled 2,557 cases of abuse of girls, which was almost twice the number of cases for boys (PSA, 2014, p. 3). Of this number, almost half (46 per cent) were cases of sexual abuse. Sexual violence against girls constituted 30% of all abuse cases reported to DSWD in 2013. Abuse cases, however, are still largely underreported.

Natural and human induced disasters aggravate the incidence of violence against girls. The protection needs of girls affected by disasters such as psychosocial support, issues of safety, lack of privacy and exposure to risks for abuse are not being fully addressed. In consultations conducted by child rights CSOs with girls and boys affected by Typhoon Yolanda (Save the Children, 2013c), the girls recounted their experience with so much fear brought about by the destruction of their houses and constant danger they and their loved ones faced. Some girls reported that they menstruated more than once a month due to so much stress. They felt unsafe at the evacuation centers. Men peeped at them while using the comfort rooms. Many of them overheard stories that frightened them, like men constantly fighting, fugitives ransacking houses and raping women, or girls being kidnapped.

The armed conflict and mining operations in parts of Mindanao resulted in forced migration, which hampers girls' access to education and exposes them to more risks such as trafficking, sexual abuse and psychosocial stress. Moreover the military presence in communities hinders the girls' development, as children and their families perennially evacuate or are displaced as government armed forces encamp in schools, places of worship, and even in their houses. Girl children are vulnerable to sexual abuses and other degrading or inhumane treatment by the armed forces (Save the Children, 2014d).

Girls in conflict-affected communities are vulnerable to violence as the state forces encamp in the communities, befriending and seducing girls into sexual relationships that would usually lead to pregnancy. From July 2010 to June 2014, the Children's Rehabilitation Center documented two cases of girls who were harassed and later arrested by the armed forces, tagging them as members of the New People's Army. There are also reported cases of rape committed by the Armed Forces against girls. The Children's Rehabilitation Center documented three recent cases of rape perpetrated by the state forces

in the Cordillera and Baras, Rizal. Two of the victims suffered from different levels of post-traumatic syndrome (Save the Children, 2014d).

In the Child Protection Rapid Assessment report conducted in Central Mindanao (Child Protection Working Group [CPWG] Central Mindanao, 2014), some key informants interviewed believe that victims-survivors of sexual violence after conflict incidents are mostly girls, girls being more targeted than boys, although sexual violence can happen to both girls and boys. “The culture of silence and denial and lack of awareness are prevalent in the communities, making it difficult to determine the extent of the problem of sexual violence” (CPWG, 2014, p. 33). The majority of those interviewed had very little knowledge of the availability of services for girl victim-survivors of sexual violence.

Girls with disabilities are also especially at risk of violence. The Philippine Coalition on the U.N, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2013) reports: “The snapshot of the current human rights situation among persons with disabilities in the Philippines is particularly provocative in the few, or even single reports of disturbing, heinous incidents. One set of these incidents almost always involved women and young girls: rape to the point of death; gang rape by as many as ten men; rape cases of girls five years old and younger; years-long incest regularly by fathers; sexual violence under threat of deadly weapons, and rape by a religious figure or teacher” (p. 4).

In several occurrences of rape, and other forms of sexual abuse of girls with disabilities by teachers, school officials or staff, the ensuing action by DepEd was just to transfer the perpetrators to other schools or regions. Children with disabilities who live on the streets face sexual assault on a daily basis. Furthermore, the systematic efforts for data gathering and documentation on a national basis have been so very meager and these have allowed continuing cycles of increasing powerlessness and marginalization.

Strategic Objective L8. *Promote the girl child’s awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life*

The Philippines has made significant steps towards fulfilling the civil and political rights of girls and boys, including the right to citizenship and the right to be heard in matters that affect them. Birth registration, for one, is essential to one’s dignity—to have a name and an identity, and be recognized and counted as a citizen in a country. In the context of the Philippines, birth registration is often required to be able to gain access to basic services. While having a national civil registration system, birth registration is not accessible especially in remote rural areas, and among indigenous and Muslim communities. The latest available data show the total estimated unregistered Filipinos at 5.3 million. In some areas in ARMM, very few of the respondents are familiar with the civil registration process. Worse, only one to four in ten

respondents said they had birth certificates (Plan International, 2014). While most respondents appreciate birth certificates as instruments to access basic services such as education, many do not realize its importance in ensuring girls' special protection against discrimination, abuse and exploitation.

In relation to child participation, the government adopted the National Framework on Child Participation in 2004. Policies were put in place providing the legal mandate for girls and boy's participation in identified national and local governmental structures. The Social Reform Alleviation Act (RA 8425) mandates the representation of children in the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC). The Local Government Code provides for the creation of the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK), a youth council in every barangay composed of children aged 15–17. Meanwhile, DILG Memorandum Circular 2002-121 sets the guidelines on the organization and strengthening of the LCPC, a body which supports the organizing of child and youth groups in barangays.

Through the LCPCs, children are able to participate in seminars related to gender sensitivity and in sports activities. They are able to initiate activities related to their priority issues, promote awareness on children's rights and monitor the situation of children in their community. A study shows that children and youth participation has been able to create changes in the children's level of awareness of their rights, expressive skills, self-esteem, and desirable social behavior (Ruiz, n.d.). CSOs involved in these participation mechanisms observed that in many areas where children and children's groups were engaged, a significant number and, in many cases, the majority of the children actively participating are girl children (Save the Children, 2014d).

Although there are such mechanisms and venues for children to participate in decision making within their communities and in government at different levels, these platforms are not very accessible to most girls and boys, especially those who are not in school and those from remote areas. In consultations, children claimed that their participation in the NAPC Children Basic Sector and the BCPC were largely facilitated by CSOs supporting their organizations. It was also found that while child participation in the NAPC-CBS could be considered "participation at the highest level," it also had its costs (Ruiz, n.d.). In the process, the children were forced by circumstance to sacrifice some aspects of their childhood and the exercise of some of their rights as children. The children were also exposed to "adult-led and adult-managed condition that was seemingly opposed to the promotion of child-friendly environment." Children's participation was also described as "tokenistic," with children "seemingly [having] a voice but in fact [having] little or no influence" (Institute of Philippine Culture [IPC], 2014, p. 18). There was also an observed tendency for the modes of participation to "promote conformity and discourage independent, critical thinking and decision making...particularly in the rural areas." In response, the Council for the Welfare of Children developed the National Guidebook on Child Participa-

tion, which further defines child participation in the BCPC and the NAPC, and underscores the equal participation of girls and boys.

Among the existing government mechanisms, the Sangguniang Kabataan, or youth council, is the most strategic, as it is part of the local government structure at the barangay level and is federated up to the national level. Its members are elected at large by a constituency of children aged 15–17 and manages a budget equivalent to 10 per cent of the total internal revenue allocation of the barangay. In some cities in the NCR, the SK budget can be as high as Php3 million. Unfortunately the SK has been riddled with issues. A study on the SK reveals that SK officials feel that they are just being used by local politicians for their own political agendas, and that they are just considered as “consultative bodies” that do not have “real power” in government. They also complain that they are not adequately supported by the local government (United Nations Children’s Fund [UNICEF] & Department of Interior and Local Government [DILG], 2007, p. 23). An assessment of SK performance also showed that it had been generally weak in terms of performing its key functions such as planning, reporting and formulating local ordinances. The SK also caused the SK members to neglect their studies and/or their house chores. They also admitted that they learned to be corrupt (UNICEF & DILG, 2007, p. 32). Despite this, some SK members claimed to have learned to become public servants and were able to develop their skills.

The long-standing issues of corruption, absenteeism, nepotism and incompetence, among others, faced by the SK have convinced some quarters to push for its abolition. However, through a strong lobby from the youth sector, a law was passed seeking only to suspend the bill while a proposed law to reform the SK is still pending. As a result, the Senate passed the SK Reform Bill (Senate Bill No. 2401), which increases the age of SK members from 15–17 to 18–24. By raising the age, the proposed law will threaten children’s formal representation in the local government and will systematically exclude children from participating in the local governance process. The Bata Muna, a loose network of child-focused CSOs, conducted consultations on the SK in different parts of the country and found out that the SK experienced difficulty in developing and implementing projects not because of their age but because of the inadequate support from adults, and the corruption and patronage politics that characterize the environment of the SK. According to children consulted, the SK had been weak mainly because of “the lack or poor quality of support and capacity building that SK officials receive from adult leaders and government officials, and [because] the latter had not provided SK leaders the positive role model that they can emulate” (Bata Muna, 2014, p. 1).

There are, however, good practices from both government and NGOs in supporting children’s participation in governance. On the government side, the first ever Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Children’s

Forum (ACF) was organized in 2010 in the Philippines, through the initiative of the Philippines Government. This paved the way for the ASEAN's adoption of the Children's Forum as a permanent mechanism for engaging children at the regional level. The forum is held every two years. The Philippine National Children's Conference is also held as a preparatory process for the ACF to consult children on the agenda of the ACF and facilitate the selection of the Philippine delegates who will attend the Forum.

Outside of these formal mechanisms, there is also considerable organizing work that has been taking place among children through the initiatives of NGOs. According to CWC there are around 500 children's organizations, which are mostly supported by civil society groups (IPC, 2014, p. 18). NGOs have organized several children's congresses and consultations or summits to provide venues for girls and boys to discuss their issues and concerns, and put forward their recommendations.

There are also a number good practices among NGOs in strengthening and facilitating the participation of girls and boys at local and national levels. Tambayan, a Davao-based NGO, has been supporting gangs composed of girls to be better organized and gain the capacity to be involved in more productive activities. The gangs have already formed an alliance at the city level, called NAKAMATA, and are now recognized by the local government as legitimate children's organizations. These groups have been regularly invited by the Regional Sub-committee on the Welfare of Children and by the City Government in consultations with children.

On other hand, the government accepted inputs from a 2006 consultation with trafficking girl survivors to the Philippine Guidelines for the Protection of Trafficked Children. The consultation was organized by the Child Protection Unit Network, which also published and disseminated the guidelines in 2009. The government likewise recognized the results of the children's consultation conducted by the child rights CSOs in areas affected by Typhoon Yolanda.

However, the institutionalized mechanism for regular consultation with girls and boys, including those with disabilities, in developing programs and policy and monitoring state's progress against the Beijing Platform for Action remains lacking. The effect of the absence of this mechanism can be dire. For instance, because girls were not consulted and were not active in the advocacy for the RPRH Law, the provision granting girls and boys access to reproductive health information and services was compromised.

Strategic Objective L9. *Strengthen the role of the family in improving the status of the girl-child*

The CRC recognizes the right of the child "to know and be cared for by his or her parents" (CRC, Art. 7), and the important role of parents as "hav-

ing the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child," with "the best interests of the child [as] their basic concern" (CRC, Art. 18.1). The Philippine government has taken concrete steps in recent years to help strengthen families so they can better promote the rights and support the basic needs of their children. It enacted the Foster Care Act of 2012 (RA 10165), which provides children who are abandoned, neglected, surrendered, orphaned, victims of abuse and exploitation, or are without parental support, or are in temporary placement pending formal adoption, with planned temporary substitute parental care through a foster parent. It has also complemented its national cash transfer program, the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino* Program, with Family Development Sessions (FDS) aimed at equipping parents with knowledge on responsible parenthood and on how to supplement their income through development of skills for various types of livelihoods (DSWD, 2013). In some areas, NGOs have been partnering with the DSWD in conducting sessions within the FDS on topics that include children's health and nutrition and positive discipline. Related to this, the DSWD has been implementing parenting programs to build the knowledge and skills of parents and carers to enable parents to better perform their parental role and responsibility, including playing a key role in the education of their children (Yangco, 2006, p. 102). These programs include the community-based Parent Effectiveness Service (PES); and Empowerment and Reaffirmation of Paternal Abilities (ERPAT), which aims to challenge and eliminate gender roles in parenting, and strengthen the role of fathers in child rearing by targeting male parents for parenting education.

However, much needs to be done to sensitize and shift behaviors among parents. As earlier mentioned, the majority of Filipino parents still use physical and humiliating or degrading punishment to discipline their children. The passage of an anti-corporal punishment law will not only ensure that girls and boys enjoy equal protection in the law against physical and mental assault, but will help significantly in changing attitudes and behaviors, and setting the norm for nonviolent parenting and discipline of children. Neglect and abandonment are also still prevalent. In 2013, of the abuse cases served by DSWD, 37% (1,418 cases) were cases of neglect and 17% (652 cases) were of abandonment (PSA, 2014, p. 3). Among boys, more than half (54%) of the abuse cases reported concerning boys were cases of neglect. The number of neglected girls (722), however, is still higher compared to the number of neglected boys (696). In the case of abandonment, there were more abandoned boys than girls (363 vs. 289).

The phenomenon of children being left behind by a parent or both parents working overseas is also an emerging concern (Save the Children, 2011). Millions of these children are often left with individual parents or with relatives or family friends. Experiences show that the long-term separation of the children from their parents can have negative impacts on children's well-being, development and future life. The absence of substantive research on

the situation of children of overseas workers has also resulted in a corresponding absence of programs to address their specific needs and concerns.

CONTINUING AND NEW CHALLENGES, AND POSSIBLE ACTION POINTS

Addressing Legal Gaps

While Philippines laws provide considerable protection for girls' rights, the inconsistency of certain laws (Indigenous Peoples Rights Act and the Code of Muslim Personal Laws), including customary laws, with the CRC and CEDAW continue to pose risks to both girls and boys. The Philippine Congress needs to exercise its oversight function by proactively assessing the impact of existing laws on children's rights and best interests, looking specifically at long-term consequences and impacts on girls' and boys' health and education, and taking into consideration children's viewpoints. It is also recommended that Congress adopt a process of determining and assessing—with the meaningful involvement of children—the potential impact of proposed laws on children before these are enacted. Specific legal gaps also need to be addressed by enacting much needed child rights-based laws, such as those prohibiting corporal punishment in all settings, including the home; on a more comprehensive, effective and rights-based civil registration; declaring the Filipino Sign Language as the national sign language; setting a higher minimum age for statutory rape; incorporating child rights in the Bangsamoro legal framework; protecting the rights of children during humanitarian situations and displacement; and institutionalizing children's meaningful participation in governance.

Congress would also have to reform existing laws to remove legal barriers to girls' full access to sexual and reproductive health services, including HIV counseling and testing, in the RPRH Law and revise the *Kasambahay* Act to remove children from domestic work by increasing the age of persons who can be employed as domestic workers to 18 years.

To further strengthen domestic legal frameworks and justice systems, and ensure that the violations of rights of children are addressed, Congress should immediately ratify the CRC Optional Protocol on Communications (OP3 CRC), which will allow children to submit complaints regarding specific violations of their rights under the Convention and its first two optional protocols. The Protocol opened for signature in February 2012 and entered into force upon ratification by 10 UN Member States in April 2014. There is need to involve civil society including girl children in discussing and addressing issues related to the ratification. Legislators and key officials of different government agencies should also be informed on the OP3 CRC.

Focusing on Girls in Programs and Services

Girls are different from women. They have different experiences, needs, interests and concerns. It cannot be assumed that any action directed to improve the situation of women will automatically benefit girls. Policies, programs and actions should be based on an analysis of the situation of girls, looking at specific contexts, age and other characteristics. Adolescent sexual reproductive health programs—whether government or non-government—should therefore promote and integrate a gender- and rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights for girls and boys. Education programs should be geared towards preventing dropping out especially among boys. DepEd should provide more funding for the MTBMLE program to develop gender/culture-sensitive curricula and teaching and learning materials in other ethnic languages with the participation of teachers and IP communities.

Local government units should support programs for alternative learning systems for indigenous girls in remote but strategic locations, as well as increase support for vocational-technology driven courses for girls with tie-up with business companies for immediate employment especially for those who cannot pursue tertiary education and have graduated. The DepEd should overhaul the Special Education program options so that the majority of girls with disabilities progressively gain access to schools within five years.

Establishing Gender- and Child Rights-based Data Collection, Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

The preceding sections show that the lack of sex- and age-disaggregated data has rendered girls invisible in statistics and databases, which in turn result in the design of programs and services that are generic and that do not address their very specific concerns. The lack of data and information on girls in very specific situations such as girls with disabilities, girls from indigenous and Muslim communities, girls in conflict with the law, and LGBT children also further marginalizes these groups of girls especially in relation to access to basic services. The Philippine Statistics Authority, NEDA, the national line agencies and the local government units should strengthen their data management systems by disaggregating data by sex and age, with the latter consistent with the development stages of the child and with the legal definition of the child. This will ensure the integrity of data and analysis of effectiveness of programs and policies. These systems should also integrate reliable and comprehensive mechanisms for capturing, storing and reporting of data disaggregated by disability, ethnicity, gender, and age in education, work, access to justice and health as an essential component of protection of all rights and freedoms. Local government units should ensure that mechanisms for monitoring cases of violence against girls, including girls with disabilities, are functioning and linked to effective referral and response mechanisms.

Mainstreaming the Girl Child in the Beijing Platform for Action Review Processes

The limited participation of child-focused agencies and organizations and of girl children themselves in the BPfA and CEDAW monitoring processes has contributed to the limited information and analysis of girl-child issues that have been included in past BPfA reports, whether of government or of CSOs. On the part of government, the collaboration between CWC and the PCW in monitoring progress in the implementation of the BPfA strategic objectives for the girl-child should be further strengthened. Both PCW and CWC should also work together in raising awareness on the BPfA review process among CSOs, other government agencies and girl children; and make sure that the reports and recommendations coming out of the process are likewise disseminated widely. CSOs involved in monitoring the BPfA should also create spaces specifically for girl children to participate in the implementation and review process, ensuring that the most excluded groups of girls are reached.

Institutionalizing the Participation of Girls in Governance

With the likelihood that the SK Reform Bill will be passed, it is expected that children will be excluded from these mechanisms. Girls and boys will have lost one formal venue where they can directly take part in local governance. In lieu of the SK, local government units should institutionalize mechanism for the participation of children, especially girl children, and including IP children, children with disabilities and out-of-school children. Children with disabilities themselves, and not just their families, should be enabled to participate in all government decision-making that shall impact on them. Consultations should reach out to girl children from IP and Muslim communities to determine their situation and draw out their perspectives, and use these to inform programs and services for them. As many children are now participating in various government bodies, the participation specifically of girls should also be monitored and assessed to ensure that the processes and mechanisms are inclusive and the participation itself is meaningful.

Mainstreaming Girls' Rights in Humanitarian Response

Following a disaster or conflict, humanitarian actors conduct post-disaster needs assessments to assess the impact of the disaster or conflict on the affected population, physical infrastructure, livelihoods and availability of services, among others, and determine the needs of affected households. Most of these assessments target communities and households, and do not get information directly from children. Thus, the specific needs of girls and boys are not identified and addressed. Government agencies, local government units and other humanitarian actors should consult children as part of the post-disaster needs assessment, making sure that data are disaggregated by

sex and age. The needs of girls with disabilities should also be sought out. Government and non-government actors providing humanitarian services and DRR programs should ensure that girls and boys are prioritized and that they receive the whole range of services in times of emergencies. Services specific to girls should include personal safety lessons to raise girls' awareness of sexual abuse and how to prevent this; safe physical spaces where adolescent girls can converge and interact, access to WASH facilities where girls' privacy are protected; psychosocial services for mothers and girls; and inclusion of sufficient amount of sanitary napkins in hygiene kits. The layout and design of evacuation centers should consider the safety, protection and needs of girls of all ages. Service providers should be trained on child-friendly and gender-sensitive approaches in dealing with girl children. Psychosocial support interventions; reunification; reporting and referral mechanisms; and services to prevent abuse, trafficking and exploitation should be essential components of all humanitarian responses. The local government units should immediately activate the LCPCs during emergencies for effective coordination of services related to the response; monitoring and prevention of cases of child abandonment, abuse, exploitation, child trafficking, child labor, separation and orphaned children.

Working with Parents, Families and Communities to Secure the Rights of Girl Children

Government and CSOs should work together in raising awareness among tribal and Muslim leaders and IP and Muslim communities on the negative impacts of early marriage and other harmful traditional practices especially on girls. Specifically in relation to early marriage, community support for young girl spouses and young mothers who have been emancipated because of early marriage should be mobilized. Young mothers should not be regarded as sole caretakers of her child/children, and should be provided the means to realize their full potential.

Educating parents and working with families should always be a key component of programs for girl-children. Parents and families should be made aware of the role they should play in securing the dignity of girls as human beings. Parenting education should focus on dismantling stereotypes for boys and girls; reinforcing respect and equality within the family, active involvement of women and men in childcare; and providing positive and responsible male and female role models. The DSWD should embark on a research on the situation of children left behind that will inform programs specifically targeting the families and children of OFWs

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