

Inequality, discrimination key obstacles to development: UN

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Inequality and discrimination, particularly towards women, are among the world's biggest obstacles to development, a UN report published Wednesday said.

The study, which collected data from 176 countries, stressed that growing inequality may undermine progress made in health, education and the fight against poverty in the last 20 years.

The report by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) follows up on a study issued in Cairo in 1994 after its International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

The study, titled "Beyond 2014" recommends governments take legislative measures to protect their poorest and most marginalized populations, in particular adolescents, female victims of violence and rural communities.

"The report's findings point to why governments must enact and enforce laws that eliminate inequalities and that protect [human rights](#), why they must fulfill the commitments they made in Cairo," said Fund director Babatunde Osotimehin.

He said that young females are an especially good barometer for gauging progress or the lack of it.

"Adolescent girls are particularly at risk in the poorest communities.

More girls are finishing primary school, but they are facing challenges in accessing and completing secondary education," he said.

"Supporting their aspirations, and the aspirations of all young people, is key," he said.

In the last 20 years, deaths due to pregnancy and child birth have decreased 47 percent, more girls go to school and population growth has slowed, the report said.

But some 800 women died giving birth each day in 2010, 222 million women still do not have access to contraception and one in three women across the globe says they have suffered physical or sexual violence, the report said.

"Research suggest a significant positive correlation between female education, healthier families and stronger GDP growth," the report said.

While child marriage is illegal in 158 countries, one in three females marries before age 18 in developing countries, ruining their chances for education and social mobility.

Osoimehin added that in addition, progress only benefits a small minority of people.

"The report reveals in stark detail the persistent inequalities and discrimination threatening to derail development," he said.

The report said that the world's "greatest shared challenge is that our very accomplishments ... are increasingly inequitably distributed, threatening inclusive development, the environment and our common future."

"Increasing [economic inequality](#) is disruptive and highly detrimental to sustainable development," it added.

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