

## Women and Girls in Education

### Key Facts

- **Currently, 50 million of the 72 million children currently not enrolled in primary school are girls**
- **Two thirds of the nearly 800 million adults who lack basic literacy skills are women**
- **Over the past 20 years, the percentage of children who have never attended school has fallen from 21 to 11 per cent for boys aged 10-14, and from 39 to 18 per cent for girls**
- **In two out of three countries, as many girls are going to primary school as boys**
- **95 girls to every 100 boys start school**
- **More than half of the world's out-of-school children are girls, and 7 out of 10 live in sub-Saharan Africa**
- **57 per cent of wealthy girls living in rural areas currently attend school compared to 33 per cent of poor rural girls**
- **Worldwide, there are more young women enrolled in tertiary education than young men**
- **The ratio of young women to young men's enrolment globally at the tertiary level rose from 96 in 1999 to 108 in 2007**

### Overview

*"There is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls. If we want to succeed in our efforts to build a more healthy, peaceful and equitable world, the classrooms of the world have to be filled with girls as well as boys."* – Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary General

Many parents choose to withdraw their girls before they reach the end of primary school, convinced that the lack of post-primary places and the lack on employment prospects for girls do not justify the cost of keeping them in school. Others may prioritise a son's education over a daughter's for the same reason, and because they know that their son will support them in their old age, whereas their daughter is likely to be living with her husband's family. Girls may also be withdrawn to help with household chores. Their parents may think the school is too far away and the journey unsafe. The school curriculum may not seem relevant, the quality of education may be poor and schools in general are not 'girl-friendly' – for example, there may be no separate toilet facilities.

For the past few decades, work at the national and international levels has called attention to the importance of girls' education. With these initiatives, along with actions associated with the Millennium Development Goals projects, more girls are now going to school than ever before. At the primary school level, girls' enrolment increased more than boys' in all developing regions between 2000 and 2006.

### Why is educating girls important?

Sending girls to school is foremost a matter of equity, but educating girls is not just a moral imperative. There are also economic benefits of girls' education. When girls are not educated, a society's productivity and ultimately, its rate of growth are constrained.

The beneficial impact of an educated woman on infant mortality, fertility, health and productivity is profound. Because they are mostly the primary educators and nurturers of children, the societal returns on investments in women's education are significantly greater than for similar investments in men.

Each year of school a girl receives produces measurable benefits. In Africa, the child of a woman who has not been to school has a one in five chance of dying before age 5. A child whose mother attended five years of school has a 40 per cent lower mortality risk. In China, eight years of school enables a girl to become a teacher, after which she is eligible for additional training at no cost: eight years of schooling can lift a girl out of poverty.

The impact of educating girls enables women to have a greater impact on reducing poverty in their communities: as within most communities, women are responsible for providing food, health care and education for their families. Educating girls has and creates a mutually reinforcing effect of multiple benefits.

### The Benefits of Female Education

There are several compelling benefits associated with girls' education, including the reduction of child and maternal mortality, improvement of child nutrition and health, lower fertility rates, enhancement of women's domestic role and their political participation, improvement of the economic productivity and growth, and protection of girls from HIV/AIDS, abuse and exploitation. Girls' education yields some of the highest returns of all development investments, yielding both private and social benefits that accumulate to individuals, families, and society in general by:

- **Reducing women's fertility rates**
  - Women with formal education are much more likely to use reliable family planning methods, delay marriage and childbearing, and have fewer and healthier babies than women with no formal education. It is estimated that one year of female schooling reduces fertility by 10 per cent. The effect is particularly pronounced for secondary schooling

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### The Benefits of Female Education (continued)

- When women gain four years more education, fertility per woman drops by roughly one birth
- A 65-country analysis finds that doubling the proportion of women with a secondary education would reduce average fertility rates from 5.3 to 3.9 children per woman
- **Lowering infant and child mortality rates**
  - Women with some formal education are more likely to seek medical care, ensure their children are immunised, be better informed about their children's nutritional requirements, and adopt improved sanitation practices. As a result, their infants and children have higher survival rates and tend to be healthier and better nourished.
  - An extra year of girls' education can reduce infant mortality by 5 – 10 per cent
  - In Africa, children of mothers who receive 5 years of primary education are 40 per cent more likely to live beyond age 5
- **Protecting against HIV infection:**
  - Girls' education ranks among the most powerful tools for reducing girls' vulnerability. It slows and reduces the spread of HIV, by contributing to female economic independence, delayed marriage, family planning, and work outside the home, as well as conveying greater information about the disease and how to prevent it
  - A study of Zambia finds that AIDS spreads twice as fast among uneducated girls
  - Young rural Ugandans with secondary education are three times less likely than those with no education to be living with HIV
  - A review of 113 studies indicated that school-based AIDS education programmes are effective in reducing early sexual activity and high-risk behaviour
- **Increasing women's labour force participation rates and earnings:**
  - Education has been proven to increase income for wage earners and increase productivity for employers, yielding benefits for the community and society
- **More productive agricultural outputs**
  - More productive farming due to increased female education accounts for 43 per cent of the decline in malnutrition achieved between 1970 and 1995
  - If women farmers in Kenya had the same education and inputs as men farmers, crop yields could rise by 22 per cent

### The Benefits of Female Education (continued)

- **Creating intergenerational education benefits:**
  - Mother's education is a significant variable affecting children's education attainment and opportunities. A mother with a few years of formal education is considerably more likely to send her children to school. In many countries, each additional year of formal education completed by a mother translates into her children remaining in school for an additional one-third to one-half year.
- **Education can foster democracy and women's political participation**
  - A study of 100 countries found that educating girls and reducing the gender gap tends to promote democracy

### Girls' education is beneficial nationwide

Girls' education leads to increased income, both for individuals and for the nation as a whole. Providing girls with one extra year of education beyond the average boosts future wages by 10 to 20 per cent. A study of 100 countries by the World Bank shows that increasing the share of women with a secondary education by 1 per cent boosts annual per capita income growth by up to 3 per cent. This is a substantial amount considering that per capita income gains in developing countries seldom exceed 3 per cent per year.

### The Importance of the Quality of Education

*"I have learned one thing: if you are educated, there are many choices in front of you. You do not have to follow, you can create your own road – then others will follow you."* – Tehseen, 24, India

Attendance at school is likely to boost literacy and numeracy skills, but simply attending school does not automatically make one literate. Most of the 16 per cent of the global population who cannot read or write live in South and West Asia, East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Nearly two in every three of these people are women.

Teaching children, and especially girls, basic literacy skills is a crucial component of primary school education. Without the ability to read and write, young women will be at a huge disadvantage not only in the labour market but in the rest of their lives as well. Mother who cannot read and write are often particularly keen for their daughters to learn.

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### The Importance of the Quality of Education (continued)

Girls are encouraged to keep attending school if the curriculum and the environment cater to their needs, do not make them feel inferior to boys and allow them to participate. Often this is not the case. In some countries, girls are seated at the back of the classroom, making it more difficult for them to participate.

As a result of the lack of participation or inclusion in the classroom, many young women graduate from school without having acquired basic literacy and numeracy skills. In some African countries, fewer than half of girls aged 15-24 are able to read a simple sentence after 3 years of primary school. This inevitably affects the kind of work they can then do and the lives they can lead.

### Successes and Challenges

Between 1999 and 2006, the worldwide number of children not in school declined rapidly from about 100 million to 75 million. Despite this, girls still constitute 55 per cent of all out-of-school children, down from 59 per cent in 1999.

Worldwide, for every 100 boys out of school, there are 122 girls. In some countries, this gender gap is much wider: for every 100 boys out of school in Yemen, there are 270 girls; in Iraq 316 girls; in India 426 girls, and; in Benin 257 girls.

*"I really want to study. I studied up to class five, but because of circumstances, my family now keeps me at home. I do household chores and farm work. My two elder brothers studied up to class eight...but my older sister, who is 20 hasn't studied at all. Nobody in my family supports my studies. If I got free notebooks, maybe I could study. If others also did housework, then I would have time to study."*  
– Munni, 13, Uttar Pradesh, India

There are widely held beliefs that there is no need for girls to go to school: firstly, because they can learn the skills they need to manage the household from family members and the community; secondly, because they see little point in educating a girl who will end up living with her in-laws. The short-term value of daughters is outweighed by the long-term value of sons. This is one of the main factors preventing girls from starting school, or continuing on to secondary or tertiary education.

Gender disparities still remain in both primary enrolment and school completion rates. However, many low-income countries have registered improvements in primary school completion rates, with an average increase of 6 per cent – from 63 per cent in 1999 to 74 per cent in 2006. The completion rate for girls rose by 9 per cent – from 57 per cent in 1999 to 70 per cent in 2006, while the primary school completion rates for boys increased only from 63 per cent to 70 per cent during the same period and in the same regions.

### Successes and Challenges (continued)

The MDG goal of gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005 was not met in most regions; however there is substantial cause for optimism. Most of the developing countries are on the right track for closing the gender gap in primary enrolment by 2015 if they continue at present rates of progress in enrolment and attendance rates. In order to achieve gender equality by 2015, more attention will need to be focused on access to include provision at the secondary and tertiary education levels, retention, quality, learning outcomes and relevance of education at all levels. Strategic directions for accelerating gender equality in education also include emphasis on monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of interventions as well as their impact.

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