

ABCs FOR ACTION AND ADVOCACY

EDUCATION FOR GIRLS

A: THE BIG PICTURE

GLOBAL SUMMARY

Around the world, girls are less likely than boys to have a chance to go to school. Please use these facts and action ideas to support your advocacy on behalf of girls.

Boys and girls in school and out Globally, 570 million children of primary school age are enrolled in school. But for every 100 boys not enrolled in school, there are 122 girls not enrolled.

What challenges the girls Girls are more limited than boys in their access to education, due to poverty, adverse cultural practices, quality of schools, and ability to travel to schools that are not close to home. Other emerging causes keeping them away are HIV/AIDS, orphanhood, conflicts, emergencies and other fragile situations, and gender-based violence.

Our goal In the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Achieving Universal Primary Education is Goal #2. Increasing access of girls to education is included in Goal #3, Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women.

REGIONAL UPDATES: A CLOSER LOOK

In sub-Saharan Africa, 28 million children are out of school, even after a significant jump in enrollment that began in 2000. The net primary school enrollment ratio has only recently reached 71 per cent.

In Southern Asia, the enrollment ratio has climbed above 90 per cent, which sounds very good. However, this still means that more than 18 million children are not in school. The numbers show that this issue has serious consequences for the future.

B. THE WORK IN PROGRESS

PROGRESS TO DATE

In 1999, there were 103 million children out of school.

By 2006, this number dropped to 73 million.

In 2000, child enrollment in developing countries was 83 per cent.

In 2006, it had gone up to 88 per cent on average.

Most of the progress being made is in developing regions that lag the furthest behind, overall.

From 2000 to 2007, Sub-saharan African enrollment went up by 15 percentage points, while Southern Asian enrollment increased by 11 percentage points.

However, girls in developing regions as a whole still lag behind because of their gender.

In 1999, there were 91 girls enrolled in school compared to every 100 boys.

In 2007, there were 95 girls enrolled, compared to every 100 boys.

WORK TO BE DONE

Work must be intensified to get *all* children in school, especially those living in rural communities.

Children should have equal access to education, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, or cultural heritage as a linguistic or religious minority. The target of eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 has already been missed.

C. TAKE ACTION IDEAS

Advocate for girls education

The financial crisis is taking a heavy toll on people everywhere. But when funds are short, girls and young women are affected the worst. Girls may be taken out of school to do housework instead, reinforcing gender gaps in education. Whether economic times are good or bad, education for girls benefits the students, their families, and the wider community. Here are some leading arguments for building a cost-effective case. Girls education:

- 1. Reduces women's fertility rates.** Women with formal education are much more likely to delay marriage and childbearing, and have fewer but healthier babies than women with no formal education. It is estimated that one year of female schooling reduces fertility by 10 percent. The effect is particularly pronounced when the women have attended secondary school.
- 2. Lowers infant and child mortality rates.** Women with some formal education are more likely to seek medical care, ensure their children are immunized, be better informed about their children's nutritional requirements, and adopt improved sanitation practices. As a result, their infants and children are more likely to survive, and become healthier, better nourished children.
- 3. Lowers maternal mortality rates.** Women with formal education tend to have better knowledge about health care practices, are less likely to become pregnant at a very young age, tend to have fewer, better-spaced pregnancies, and seek pre- and post-natal care. It is estimated that an additional year of schooling for 1,000 women helps prevent two maternal deaths.
- 4. Protects against HIV/AIDS infection.** Girls' education ranks among the most powerful tools for reducing girls' vulnerability. It slows and reduces the spread of HIV/AIDS by contributing to female economic independence. It results in delayed marriage and work outside the home. Educated women also know more about the disease and how to prevent it.
- 5. Increases women's labor force 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.

6. Creates intergenerational benefits. Mothers' education is a significant variable affecting children's educational 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.

Increase primary and secondary education for all children

Use this list of specifics to focus your advocacy for the sake of the children. Education for children will benefit students, their families, and their communities as well. But caring advocates are needed in order for this to happen.

1. Advocate for policies and programs aimed at increasing the enrollment rate of children from poor households and rural areas, many of whom are girls. These are the children most likely to drop out of school or to not attend at all.

2. Break down financial barriers, with:

- Cash incentives. Provide cash transfers to poor families on the condition that their children, especially their girls, are enrolled at and attending school.
- Elimination of school fees, particularly for low-income families.
- Universal coverage. Seek universal coverage in primary education, to include poor and underserved populations in rural areas and urban slums. Raise domestic spending on education to 15 to 20 per cent of national budgets while giving priority to basic education.

3. Build up the support networks that will help the children succeed:

- Be sure there are enough teaching materials to go around. Distribute textbooks free of charge.
- Give the students free meals.

- Offer basic health services at school to improve student health, nutrition and cognitive development.
- Provide transportation to and from school when needed.
- Train new teachers, while retraining and motivating those who are already teaching; recruit, train and retain more female teachers.

Promote Child-Friendly Schools

What is a Child-Friendly School? This concept is at the core of UNICEF's efforts to improve the quality of education globally. It strives for quality in five areas: (1) learners, (2) content, (3) teaching-learning processes, (4) learning environments, and (5) outcomes. Experience shows that such a framework is a powerful tool for providing a good education.

How is this kind of school organized? A quality school is best organized when local leaders assess what is needed, then plan and manage the school to achieve their goals.

What are the traits of a quality school? A Child-Friendly School is:

► INCLUSIVE

- Does not exclude, discriminate or stereotype on the basis of difference
- Does respect and ensure the quality of learning for all children
- Provides accessible, free/affordable, compulsory education, especially for families of children at risk

► EFFECTIVE FOR LEARNING

- Promotes good quality teaching and learning processes with individual instruction appropriate for each child's development level, abilities and learning style
- Uses active, cooperative and democratic learning methods; structures the content and offers study materials that are of good quality
- Promotes outcomes by defining what children need to learn, helping them to learn it, and teaching them how to learn

► HEALTHY AND PROTECTIVE OF CHILDREN

- Ensures a hygienic and safe learning environment, with adequate water and sanitation facilities and healthy classrooms, policies and practices

► GENDER SENSITIVE

- Guarantees an appropriately gender-friendly facility, curriculum, textbook and teaching-learning process
- Treats girls and boys equally in their enrollment and achievement

► INVOLVED WITH CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

- Encourages local partnership in education
- Promotes child participation
- Works to strengthen families as the child's primary caregivers.

ENDNOTES

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