



A Fair Chance

ATTAINING GENDER EQUALITY IN BASIC EDUCATION BY 2005

REPORT SUMMARY



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“I am now in Grade two. I am 15 years old and have been married twice, at the ages of 10 and 12. I did not stay with my second husband. My cousin advised me to go to school. I am the first child in my family and have three sisters and two brothers. I like my lessons, I stood seventh among 120 students. My younger sister was married, but because of my advice she now goes to school. My parents are not really willing to send me to school. Nevertheless, I want to continue and will advise other girls to do the same.”

– TADFE TSEGA, ETHIOPIA

65 million girls are missing

Getting girls into school means the difference between life and death for millions. Babies born to mothers without formal education are at least twice as likely to suffer from malnutrition, or die before the age of five, than those babies born to mothers who completed primary school.¹ Even one or two years of schooling for mothers cuts child deaths by 15 per cent.² Women’s education does more to reduce malnutrition than anything else, including

increased food availability.³ It is one of the most effective ways to fight the spread of HIV-AIDS.⁴

Yet 65 million girls being denied their right to education. That’s as many as all of the school-age girls in North America and Europe. And far too little is being done about it.

At the UN Millennium Summit in 2000, world leaders agreed to get as many girls as boys into primary and secondary classrooms by 2005. Governments also promised to ensure that by 2015, all girls and boys complete primary education.

The UN itself acknowledges that without success on the education goals, there is little prospect of achieving the other Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for halving poverty by 2015. Yet, on current trends, girls’ enrolment won’t catch up with boys’ until 2025.⁵ And unless progress is accelerated, Africa won’t get all of its girls and boys into primary school until 2100.⁶

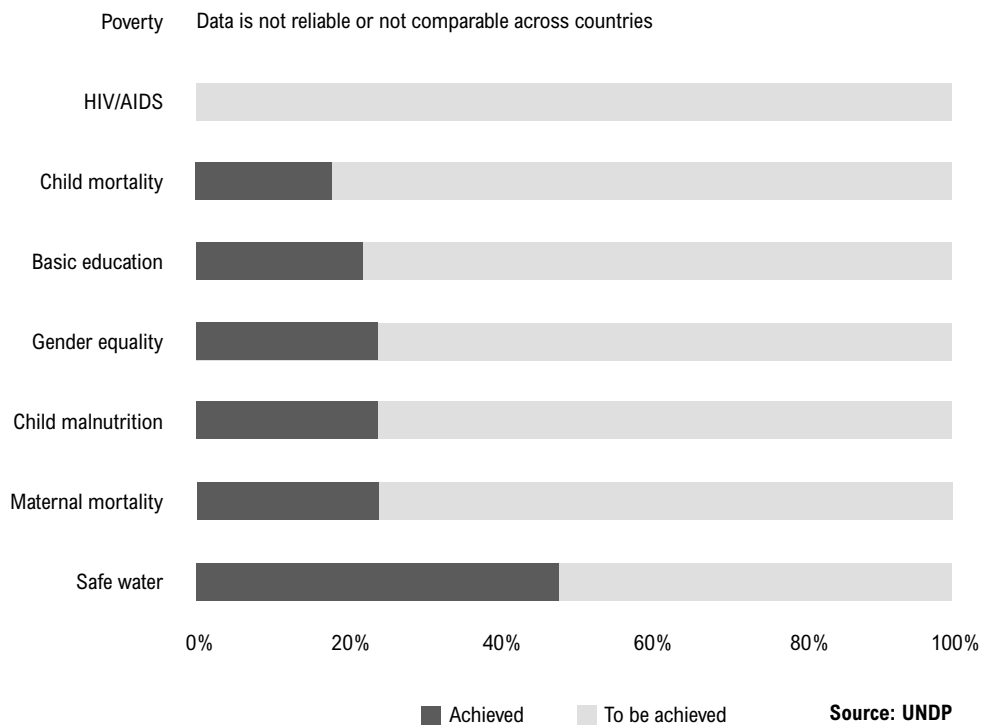
Box 1: Education Can Save Your Life

Education saves lives by giving women the confidence and power to make better choices for themselves and their children.

- In much of South Asia, women typically eat last and eat least. During pregnancy, this has disastrous consequences: high maternal and infant mortality, and low birth weight, which can cause serious health complications throughout the rest of the life cycle. Bangladeshi women with at least a fifth grade education are more likely to increase their food intake when they are pregnant – not just because they know they should, but because they are better able to influence household decisions.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, HIV/AIDS infection rates have been falling dramatically among women with at least a secondary education – not just because they have better knowledge of how to prevent transmission, but because they have the status and confidence to assert their rights. In 17 countries in Africa and four in Latin America, better-educated girls tended to delay having sex, and were more likely to require their partners to use condoms. Since young women in Africa are up to five times more vulnerable to HIV infection than young men, denying them access to education may literally cost them their lives.

Sources: Jejeebhoy, S. J. 1995. *Women’s Education, Autonomy, and Reproductive Behaviour: Experiences from Developing Countries*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Karim, R. *et al.* 2002, ‘Determinants of Food Consumption During Pregnancy in Rural Bangladesh: Examination of Evaluative Data from the Bangladesh Integrated Nutrition Project.’ Tufts University, Food Policy and Applied Nutrition Programme, Discussion Paper no. 11, July 29. World Bank 2002, *Education and HIV-AIDS: A window of hope*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank. UNAIDS 2000, *Report on the Global HIV-AIDS Epidemic*. New York: UNAIDS.

Figure 1 The MDGs: Unfinished Business



Some 88 countries need to dramatically accelerate progress for the 2005 target to be met. Clearly, a massive effort will be needed in order to avoid an outright failure. But some countries, including a few of the poorest in the world, are already making such an effort – and winning. New research by the GCE analyses the factors behind their success, and asks whether it can be repeated elsewhere.

The answer? Girls’ enrolments could grow at the rate required to reach the targets, if all poor countries made basic education free and introduced targeted subsidies to help girls in the poorest families and schools; and if all rich countries kept their promise to increase their aid to education.

“I wish my brothers and sisters came to school. I don’t think that staying away from school is good,” says Moulayhata Walet Ibdadass. Moulayhata, who has been at school for five years, hopes to complete her education and one day run her own business. In Gao, northern Mali, girls

like Moulayhata have been something of a rarity until recently. Educating girls is seen as a luxury. Currently only around 10 per cent of girls attend school and completion rates are lower still.

One of the reasons why Moulayhata has such high hopes of finishing her education is the work carried out by Taklitin Walet Farati, an NGO fieldworker. She talks to parents about the importance of girls’ education and looks after the welfare of girls already attending school. The job is a challenging one. Taklitin has to tackle both the practical and cultural reasons behind girls’ non-attendance at school.

But the opportunity costs of girls’ education are a more formidable barrier, as Taklitin explains, “I’d go and check why girls weren’t attending school, to be told by their mothers, ‘We can’t let our daughters go to school. We need them in the home. They are our hands and feet!’”

Taklitin tries to use the example of her own success to persuade parents that educating their daughters will pay off

in the long term. "Because I'd had some education, I was able to get a job at an adult literacy centre and help my family." Taklitin's NGO reports some success in raising enrolments locally. However, poverty is so deep in this part of Mali that progress on girls' education will continue to be slow and patchy unless the Government steps in with incentives or subsidies to compensate families for the time that girls need to spend studying instead of working.

Educating girls... by leaps and bounds

The experience of the world's 2005 target 'success stories' demonstrates that a few simple steps, pursued in a comprehensive and integrated fashion, can make an enormous impact on girls' enrolment and completion. Firstly, creating more primary and secondary school places as well as training and hiring more teachers, especially in disadvantaged and remote areas, is the most pressing challenge. Unless there are enough schools sited near to communities, most girls in rural areas will miss out. Secondly,

schools must be free, at least through primary level. Fees and charges affect all poor children – but they hit girls harder than boys. Thirdly, because the private returns to girls' education are often lower than the social returns, society may need to offer extra incentives to the poorest families (such as stipends and free school meals) to offset the hidden costs of educating girls, even where no tuition fees are charged. Finally, a rescue plan is needed to improve the conditions for teaching and learning, especially in rural and slum schools. At a minimum, all schools need trained teachers who are motivated and supported to do their job well; and the safety and dignity of girl pupils must be guaranteed, with sanctions in place to stop harassment and abuse.

Countries that have followed such policies and backed them with high level political support, have increased girls' participation in education by leaps and bounds, in spite of social and religious traditions that militate strongly against the education of girls.

Box 2: Political commitment to basic education in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a good example of a country whose government - under pressure from women's groups - has really bitten the political bullet and taken decisive action on gender equity.

Primary education was made compulsory by an act of parliament in 1990. A substantially strengthened women's movement helped to galvanise government commitment to abolishing the education gender gap. Their leverage was increased by the actions of international bodies, resulting in commitments to women's education and gender equity that were signed by the Government.⁸

The Prime Minister launched the National Campaign for Social Mobilisation for Basic Education in 1992. Fees for rural girls were abolished, free uniforms were distributed to girls (later discontinued) and food for education and stipend schemes were piloted. Government spending on primary education began a significant upward trend.

The Social Mobilisation campaign used multi-media techniques to spread the message, including a cartoon series called 'Meena' highlighting the importance of education for poor girls. In the mid-1990s, satellite schools were started for Grade 1 and 2, fee-free education for girls was extended to Class 10, the Female Secondary Stipend Programme was extended, and a number of other incentives offered to girls and poor children in primary school. Bangladesh has consistently allocated more than 46 per cent of its education budget to primary and mass education since 1990, and the current share of education in the total budget is nearly 16 per cent.

Other factors encouraging girls to attend school have been the availability of micro-finance (through NGOs like BRAC) and expanding job opportunities in the textile and other industries.

This consistent and high level support for girls' education has been paralleled in the NGO sector. Combined government and NGO efforts to promote access and equity in education has resulted in extraordinary gains in girl's enrolments in both primary and secondary schools over the past decade.

Bangladesh, for example, has raised girls' secondary enrolment from 13 per cent to 56 per cent in 10 years (see box 2).⁷

Yet success stories have been too few and far between. Only six out of 70 developing countries for which data is available, completely eliminated the gender disparity in primary enrolments during the 1990s.⁹ Only 13 countries closed the gender gap in secondary education.

Firm, long-term financial aid is required to enable governments to commit external resources to meet salary costs and other recurrent expenditures.

A primer for action

A generalised expansion of primary education is necessary but not sufficient to achieve the education MDGs. Action must also be taken to address the gender-specific discrimination and disadvantage that confronts girls at every step along the way, from year one enrolment, to secondary school graduation. Each country must develop, as a matter of urgency, a comprehensive strategy for gender equality in education. Governments therefore need to translate the 2005 and 2015 goals into clear operational targets, and put these targets at the heart of their education sector and poverty reduction plans.

Even though 2005 is less than two years away, no country is so far off track that it cannot eliminate gender gaps in rural and urban primary and secondary school **intake** rates by 2005. The next challenge is to ensure that **completion** rates between boys and girls are equalised by 2010. As we have seen, by far the largest gender gaps are in rural areas. So it is important to have separate rural and urban intake and completion targets. Targets for achieving gender parity in learning achievements must also be set.

Eliminating gender gaps in rural and urban primary school intake is a minimum threshold that must be achieved by 2005. If this timeline is allowed to slip,

it will become impossible to achieve universal primary education (UPE) by 2015. And, as UNDP has warned, if we fail to achieve UPE by 2015, the already uncertain prospects of attaining the other MDGs will dwindle beyond the vanishing point.¹⁰

The timetable is demanding – but if the world is serious about achieving the other Millennium Development Goals, we can't afford to let it slip any further. Progress will accelerate if governments and donors together take the following steps:

1) End the education queue

There are only a few developing countries in which affluent males have not already achieved universal primary education (UPE). There are only a few developing countries in which poor, rural girls are even close to achieving the same. In India, for example, nearly a third of rural girls have never been to school, and in Ethiopia, the figure climbs to almost two-thirds. Gender gaps are often greatest in countries where overall net enrolments are low. By failing to increase access so that there are enough free school places to accommodate all of the boys and all of the girls, governments create an education queue in which the poorest and least privileged groups, including girls, are almost certain to come last (see Figure 1 above).¹¹ The following steps are needed to get rid of this queue:

- Build enough schools and hire enough teachers to guarantee that all communities are served by a school within safe walking distance for girls.
- Remove school fees, which practically guarantee the continuing exclusion of poor rural girls. When parents can only afford to keep one child in school, daughters usually lose out. By contrast, in Uganda, following the introduction of free primary education, the number of girls enrolled increased from 1.4 million in 1996, to 3 million in 1999, and girls' share in total enrolment has steadily grown.
- Expand 'bridging' schemes developed by NGOs to attract hard-to-reach children into the school system.

- To avoid recreating the queue at secondary level, governments must plan to rapidly extend free and universal access to secondary schools. Currently, only one in five girls in Africa and two in five girls in South and West Asia, get the chance to go to secondary school.

2) Offer extra help for poor families to keep girls in school

Extra assistance, such as a free school meal, or stipends linked to regular attendance, helps poor families keep girls in school for longer. It is also an inexpensive and effective way to redistribute resources towards poor communities, since a relatively small upfront investment by governments enables poor girls to acquire a lifelong asset that allows them to escape the poverty trap. Stipends for secondary school girls have been particularly effective; they not only increase secondary enrolments, but also create strong incentives for girls to enter and complete primary level. In Bangladesh, districts where secondary school bursaries were introduced experienced a sharp decrease in child marriages, as well as soaring girls' enrolments.

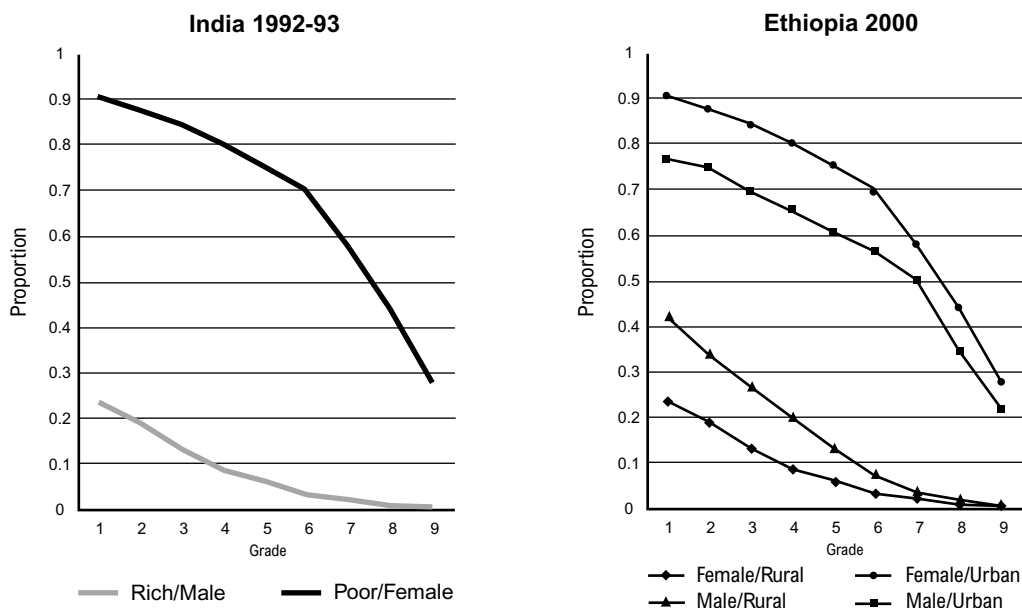
3) Launch a rescue plan for schools in poor communities

Parents withdraw girls from school if they perceive that their daughters are not learning anything; or worse, that they are vulnerable to abuse, attack and humiliation on school grounds. Yet many schools in poor, rural areas (and urban slums) lack even the basics needed to function. They frequently have far fewer resources, offer fewer hours of instruction, and attain far worse results, than schools in more affluent areas. All schools need a trained, motivated teacher who turns up every day to teach, and enough books and desks to go around. Construction of safe and private toilet facilities for girls should be mandatory. Strong sanctions against the sexual abuse and harassment of girl pupils must be enacted and enforced. A first priority should be improving the status, pay and support of teachers, especially those teachers posted to rural or 'difficult' areas.

4) Encourage a range of education provision

The scale and urgency of the action necessary to meet the 2005 makes it essential that NGOs are strongly supported in playing a complementary role

Figure 2 – Education is rationed by gender, location and wealth



in developing sustainable education provision. Sadly, not every country has an NGO of the size and vision of BRAC in Bangladesh, but much more can be done to expand and mainstream the provision by NGOs of basic education, especially to hard-to-reach groups. These schools need to develop clear 'pathways' and linkages with the formal system so that the non-formal sector does not become a 'ghetto' for girls and poor students. Greater flexibility is needed so that eventual transfer to state schools is facilitated and encouraged. There is a danger that the new, wide-ranging education sector development plans, that are currently being rolled out in many countries, do not pay enough attention to this key role of NGOs, nor have NGOs been sufficiently involved in the design and management of these sector plans.

5) Engage with civil society

Experience shows that a top-down approach to girls' education is not only ineffective, it may create resistance and resentment that will ultimately be counter-productive – a leading cause of 'implementation failure' in girls' education (Ramachandran 1998). The participation of communities, teachers and women's groups in the policy-making process is crucial to developing appropriate, well-informed responses to local complexities, and generating the broad-based support needed to implement them successfully.

6) Break the glass ceiling

Given the unemployment crisis in most countries, school leavers stand little chance of finding a job in the 'formal sector', unless they have done well in their secondary school leaving examinations. Moreover, many of the health and productivity benefits of educating girls are not fully unlocked until secondary education is attained. This highlights the importance of balanced investment by donors and governments in increasing girls' access, completion and achievement at secondary level.

In the large majority of countries, gender inequalities are most serious at universities and

other higher education institutions. It is often forgotten that the gender parity goal includes equity at tertiary level by 2015. Expanding the output of female graduates from these institutions is essential in order to ensure that women can begin to occupy the full range of professional and management jobs, and in doing so, break down dominant patriarchal views about gender and employment. Increasing the numbers of educated and qualified women can act as a powerful and positive influence on girls.

7) Counter the impact of HIV/AIDS

The AIDS epidemic has very serious implications for the attainment of gender equality in basic education, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Girls are likely to be particularly badly affected by the impact since they will be expected to look after sick parents and other family members, as well as take over some of their household activities. Girl orphans are also thought to be more vulnerable than boys and are therefore very likely to drop out of school. Given that AIDS-related mortality is expected to be highest among young female adults, this has possible far reaching implications for female teachers and any attempt to increase the number of female teaching staff. It is essential, therefore, that in high HIV prevalence countries, comprehensive strategies are developed by Ministries of Education with their partners to both prevent and mitigate the impact of the epidemic on students and teachers, particularly females.

8) Invest more in girls

Countries that have achieved success in girls' schooling are ones that have dramatically increased their own spending on basic education to as much as 20 per cent of their budget, or 3 per cent of their GDP. Yet even at this high level of government commitment, low-income countries will still need a substantial increase in aid and debt relief. To meet the 2005 and 2015 education goals, rich countries would need to provide \$5.6 bn per year. That's less than three days of global military spending, and

about the same as what American parents spend on Barbie dolls for their daughters.

Since 2000, the international community, which has promised to co-finance the Millennium Development Goal effort, has repeatedly failed to find adequate funds for poor countries that are ready to implement national plans to achieve education for all. The nine countries in this study alone face a financing gap of about USD \$1bn per year.¹² Until the financing gap is closed, the gender gap cannot be closed either.

9) A global initiative for the education goals

Aid not only needs to be increased, it needs to be intelligently targeted towards countries that face the greatest numerical and financial challenges in attaining the 2005 and 2015 goals, and whose governments show real and demonstrated commitment to redressing gender inequalities. Firm, long-term financial aid is required to enable governments to commit external resources to meet salary costs and other recurrent expenditures.

The Global Campaign for Education is calling for the implementation of a global financing framework for basic education, in order to channel increased aid to the countries that are most in need of additional resources and have good policies in place for meeting the 2005 and 2015 education goals. The Fast Track Initiative (FTI), endorsed last year by the G7 leaders, the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF, provides a starting point. The FTI could be enormously helpful in accelerating progress towards the 2005 and 2015 targets, by guaranteeing the long-term predictable financing that governments need to provide free and universal access, and to achieve minimum quality levels in all schools. However, the FTI's impact on the 2005 goal will be limited unless it includes funding for subsidy programmes to get girls into school. Donors must also agree a timetable

for expanding FTI entry to more countries, including those with the most out-of-school girls and largest gender gaps.

We know what needs to be done to provide all girls with their right to a basic education, we know what it will cost. We also know what a high price there is to be paid for failure. We must now mobilise this ambition and all the available resources to implement and achieve what we know to be right.

"I didn't go to school because I had so much work at home. Here at school, I am learning so much. I am learning to think well of myself. I want to become a teacher, so that I can make others feel like me now."

– SANGEETA, 16, INDIA.

Notes

¹ Bicego G., and O. Ahmad 1996, *Infant and Child Mortality, Demographic and Health Surveys Comparative Studies no. 20*. Calverton, Maryland: Macro International Inc.

² World Bank 2002, *HIV-AIDS and Education: A window of hope*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

³ Smith, L. C., and L. Haddad 2000, *Explaining Child Malnutrition in Developing Countries: A Cross Country Analysis*. IFPRI Research Report. No.111. Washington, D.C.: International Food Policy Research Institute.

⁴ World Bank 2002, *HIV-AIDS and Education: A window of hope*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

⁵ Vandemoortele, J. 2002, 'Are the MDGs Feasible?', UNDP Bureau for Development Policy, processed July.

⁶ UNDP and UNICEF 2002, *The Millennium Development Goals in Africa*. Report prepared in June at the request of the G8 Personal Representatives for Africa.

⁷ UNESCO 2002, *Global EFA Monitoring Report*. New York: UNESCO.

⁸ Roushan, J. 1998, 'The Bangladesh Experience', in Ramachandran (ed.), *Bridging the Gap Between Intention and Action: Girls' and Women's Education in South Asia*, Delhi: APSBAE and UNESCO, pp 33–34.

⁹ As measured by Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER). Very small countries with less than 0.5 million population have been excluded.

¹⁰ Vandemoortele, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Filmer, D. 1999. 'The Structure of Social Disparities in Education: Gender and Wealth.' Policy Research Report on Gender and Development. Working Paper. No. 5. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.

¹² World Bank 2002, *A Chance for Every Child*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.