Educating Girls for a Better World

Today, nearly 58 million children around the world are not in school\textsuperscript{15}. Educated children grow up to earn higher wages, contribute to stronger economies, support healthier and more prosperous families, and create more stable and secure societies. Making sure the millions of out-of-school children have access to an education will require U.S. leadership for a new, multilateral education initiative.

Investing in a girl’s education is an investment in a more prosperous future – not only for girls, but for entire communities and countries. Study after study shows that investing in the education of women and girls can reduce poverty, stimulate the economy, and lead to better health and nutrition outcomes for women and their families. And yet, 62 million (primary school and lower secondary) of the world’s 121 million out-of-school children are girls\textsuperscript{15}.

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

Women and girls make up nearly 70 percent of the poor worldwide.\textsuperscript{1} Economic empowerment and the ability to earn a living wage is one of the most effective ways for people to lift themselves out of poverty. Investing in education for women and girls is necessary to ensure that women can earn enough money to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

- Women make up an increasing share of the workforce\textsuperscript{16} (39.6% globally in 2015), but in many regions, women are disproportionately employed in “vulnerable jobs” in agriculture and in the services sector as factory workers. These jobs are often characterized by informal working arrangements that lack decent working conditions and adequate wages.\textsuperscript{2}
- Gains are even higher at the secondary level. For every additional year of secondary schooling, a girl’s future wages increase by up to 15-25 percent.\textsuperscript{3}
- When women control the family budget, they are more likely than men to invest in children’s health and well-being.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1} Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All, UNESCO http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/oosci-global-report-en.pdf
Stimulating Local and Global Economies

Child labor, early marriage, school fees, discrimination, conflict, poor school quality, lack of teachers, and health crises such as HIV/AIDS, are just some of the barriers that prevent girls from accessing a quality basic education. By denying girls access to a quality education, countries are missing out on the potential for substantial economic growth.

- In 2007, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific estimated that Asia-Pacific countries are missing out on $16-30 billion dollars per year in economic growth due to the gender gap in education.5
- Losses are highest for primary education, when girls are building the literacy and numeracy foundations that will help them find better jobs or allow them to go on to further schooling.6
- PLAN International has estimated that 65 low-, middle-income and transition countries that fail to offer boys and girls the same secondary education opportunities together miss out on $92 billion per year in economic growth.7
- In Kenya, if women farmers are given the same level of education as their male partners, their yields for maize, beans and cowpeas increase by up to 22%. Education Counts (EFA Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO, 2011)

Promoting Better Health and Nutrition

Educated girls pass on the benefits of their education to their children and families, especially when it comes to nutrition and health outcomes.

- Child malnutrition underlies 45% of all deaths among young children (WFP, Hunger Statistics, 2015)
- The largest contributing factor to ending child malnutrition has been the education of women – even more so than direct food aid.8
- In developing countries, women produce 60 to 80 percent of food crops.9 In Sub-Saharan Africa, investing in education of women has the potential to boost agricultural output by 25 percent.10

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6 UNESCAP, p. 103.
• Children of mothers with an education are twice as likely to survive past the age of 5 than if born to mothers without a secondary education.¹¹

• In Indonesia, children of mothers with a secondary education are 68 percent more likely to be immunized.¹²

• As girls approach adolescence, their bodies change and menstruation begins, malnutrition can lead to anemia (iron deficiency). Rates of anemia for girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are 22 percent on average in India (with some regions reaching closer to 90 percent), 40 percent in Mali and Tanzania, showing persistent poor nutrition of girls. *(International Journal of Advanced Nutritional and Health Science “Prevalence of Undernutrition and Anemia among the Child Beneficiaries of Mid-Day Meal Program” 2014.)*

• In Brazil, child malnutrition began declining dramatically around the mid-1990s due to the expansion of primary schooling (leading to improved maternal education), maternal and child health services, and — to a lesser extent — the improvement of water supply and sanitation systems. This decrease of malnutrition led to the elimination of the urban-rural gap in Brazil. *(UNESCO Report P. 43)*

• A study in Zimbabwe showed that the proportion of students who knew where to go for help with HIV-related problems increased from 47% to 76%, and the proportion of those who believed condoms were effective increased from 49% to 71% as a result of the Grassroot Soccer program *(UNESCO Report P. 88)*

**Enrollment is Different From Attendance**

*Recent research by Plan International found that in a study of nine countries nearly eight percent of girls had never been enrolled in school and that enrollment is in itself not a meaningful measure of school attendance. (Because I Am A Girl Report P.35)*

• In a survey of 42 countries, poor rural girls are twice as unlikely to attend school than urban girls (UN: Women Watch Facts & Figures 2012.)

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¹² UNESCO. 2011b. p. 36
• Early marriage of girls between 13 and 15 years of age further contributes to girls’ attendance patterns and early drop-out (Because I Am A Girl Report P. 41)

• Girls engage in several aspects of work in the household – cooking, fetching water and firewood, childcare – as well as going to market (Because I Am A Girl Report P.41)

• If girls fall too far behind in school at the critical ages of 13 and 14 they risk dropping out and never returning. If they do continue to secondary education, they do not stay for very long (Because I Am A Girl Report P. 42)

Looking Beyond Basic Education

The international community – including the U.S. – committed to achieving universal basic education by 2015 as part of the Millennium Development Goals. A quality basic education builds the foundation upon which girls can build a better future, but women and girls who have access to quality secondary education or vocational training make even greater gains for themselves, their families, their communities and their countries.

• A 100-country World Bank study found that a one percentage point increase in the number of women with a secondary school education increases annual per capita income growth by an average of 0.3 percentage points.\textsuperscript{13}

• Preliminary studies show that girls’ enrollment in secondary education is positively correlated with more women being elected to seats in national parliaments.\textsuperscript{14} At the end of 2012, the number of women members of parliament globally rose to 20.4% from 19.6% in the beginning of the year. (UN Millenial Goals, P. 1)

• In Benin, 6% of poor girls compared to 60% of rich boys achieve basic numeracy skills. (Brookings: A Commitment to Raise the Global Ambition for Girls’ Education, 2014)

• More than one in ten young women aged 15 to 19 are pregnant or mothers in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and South Asia, and nearly 30% in countries such as Bangladesh, Liberia and Mozambique


(World Bank, 2010). This is due to deeply engrained social, cultural and economic barriers, such as early marriage, which tend to prevent them from continuing education (UNESCO Report P.235)

- The median age for marriage among women with a secondary education, compared with those who have no education or only a primary school education, is over two years higher in Bangladesh and Nigeria, three years higher in Ethiopia and Mali, and four years higher in Chad (UNESCO Report P. 236)

- While 69% of teachers were against school re-entry for pregnant girls in 2001, 84% expressed a positive attitude after receiving training in 2004. Opposition also decreased among parents, from 53% to 25% (UNESCO Report P. 236)

- Only around one in three children in the last grade of primary school enter secondary general education in Angola and Burundi (Education For All Global Monitoring Report, P. 233, 2012).

- In Latin America, children whose mothers have some secondary schooling remain in school for two to three more years than children of mothers with less schooling. Education Counts (EFA Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO, 2011)

**Fast Facts**

- One extra year of primary education increases a person’s wages approximately 5 to 15 percent. For girls, the rate of return for one additional year of secondary education is as high 25 percent. (Herz, B. “Educating Women and Girls” U.S. Department of State. June 2011).

- In Sub-Saharan Africa, investing in education of women has the potential to boost agricultural output by 25 percent (Global Partnership for Education, 2015).

- In Sub-Saharan Africa, 1 in 9 children die each year before reaching their 5th birthday (Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed Progress Report 2012), but children of mothers with a full primary education are 40 percent more likely to survive to age 5. (Hertz and Sperling 2004)

- More secondary schools are located in urban areas, limiting access to those from rural poor households who cannot afford the cost of transport (UNESCO Report P. 233)

- With secondary education costs often three to five times higher than primary, poverty plays a prominent role in the low transition rates for girls and their withdrawal from education (Because I Am A Girl Report P. 47)