Investing in Education Means Healthier Communities

Today, 58 million children around the world do not have access to basic education. 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.

A quality basic education helps people develop the skills that allow them to make healthy decisions for themselves and their children. Studies show that investing in education improves maternal and child health, reduces malnutrition, and slows the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Improving maternal and child health

Studies show that investing in the education of girls and women can significantly improve the health not only of mothers, but also of their children.

- As of 2013, about 289,000 mothers die each year as a result of complications of pregnancy and childbirth, yet ¾ of these deaths are considered to be avoidable.

- In an international survey, “women with lower educational levels are more likely to die than women with higher educational levels.” Therefore, offering equal education opportunities for women helps reduce maternal mortality.

- In countries such as Chad, Bolivia, and Burundi, a girl aged 15-19 is twice as likely to face the risk of maternal mortality than a woman over the age of 20.

- In a 2011 report, women with no education had 2.7 times higher risk of dying from pregnancy complications or childbirth than mothers with primary education. Mothers with between one and six years of education had twice the risk of maternal mortality than women with more than 12 years of education.

- Research shows that as women gain four additional years of education, fertility rates drop by one birth, but girls with fewer than seven years schooling are more likely to be married by age 18.

- Education is a key factor in reducing the fertility rate in developing countries. Argentina allocates only 4.9% of its GDP to education and has a fertility rate of 2.29. However, Brazil spends 5.1% of its public expenditure on education and has a fertility rate of only 1.82.

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• Within the past 40 years, the increase in women’s education has prevented more than 4 million child deaths. In Sub-Saharan Africa alone, approximately 1.8 million children’s lives could have been saved if all mothers had at least secondary education. -UN Education First Initiative

• Children of mothers with a primary education are 50 percent more likely to receive life-saving immunizations. Yet, “mothers’ education” is listed as a major risk factor as to why children are not immunized in developing countries. -WHO, Epidemiology of the Unimmunized Child, 2009

• In India, the main resource for tackling malnutrition is a network of Anganwadi centers which cater to children under 6, pregnant women, and lactating mothers. Unfortunately, they are not fulfilling their potential. A survey of more than 74,000 mothers found that only 19% of them reported receiving nutrition counseling. -UNESCO Report P. 43

• A child born to a mother who can read is 50% more likely to survive past age 5. Each extra year of a mother’s schooling reduces the probability of infant mortality up to 10%. -Education Counts EFA Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO, 2011

• 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. -EFA Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO, 2011

Reducing malnutrition

Every year, 2.6 million children die from hunger related causes. Education can help reduce malnutrition by increasing agricultural productivity and giving people the knowledge they need to make smart decisions about food. Investing in education for women and girls has even greater potential for reducing malnutrition around the world.4

• Poor nutrition causes about 45% of all deaths among children under five. -Series on Maternal and Child Nutrition, The Lancet, 2013

• As of 2015, pregnant and breastfeeding women are the demographic group most at risk of malnutrition in South Sudan after children, making up 12 percent of all those on supplementary feeding programs.18.
• Just four years of primary schooling can boost farmers’ productivity by nearly 9 percent. Yet on a bigger scale, one additional year of primary schooling can improve the global economy 10 percent. -Fordham University, Educating Girls Can Boost Global Outlook, say Experts, 2015

• In developing countries, women produce 60 to 80 percent of food crops.

• In Sub-Saharan Africa, investing in education of women has the potential to boost agricultural output by 25 percent.

• In a 2014 study, 7.1% of 186 children in Swat, Pakistan were malnourished. 35.6% of the mothers of malnourished children were uneducated, and only 25.5% of the mothers had completed primary (5 years) education. It was concluded that lack of education is a major risk factor for malnutrition in children.

Preventing HIV/AIDS

Often called the “social vaccine,” studies show that education can reduce the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission. Schools can also play an integral role in fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic by disseminating information about HIV prevention and treatment to students, teachers, parents, and organizations outside the school community.

• Even without HIV-specific interventions, a good quality education offers protection against HIV by providing information and skills, and developing the values that help young people make smart choices.

• “Women with secondary education are more likely to know how to prevent mother to child transmission of HIV, an infection that contributed to 230,000 fatalities in 2011 alone.” -UN Education First Initiative

• In Africa, AIDS spreads twice as fast among uneducated girls than girls with even a primary level of education. –Millennium Project

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Because nearly 33% of new HIV infections occur in youth aged 15 to 24, the primary education years are optimal for addressing HIV/AIDS in education.\(^{10}\)

Women with post-primary education are 5 times more likely than illiterate women to be educated on the topic of HIV and AIDS. –EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2011

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

Due to education and preventative measures, HIV prevalence among young people in South Africa fell by 42% in Sub-Saharan Africa. –AVERT, 2014

In recent years, most countries have reported that their schools offered at least 30 hours of life skills programs in an effort to increase HIV education in primary school (Clarke and Aggleton, 2012).

Young women are particularly vulnerable, accounting for more than 60% of all young people living with HIV, and 71% of all young people living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa -UNESCO Report P.84

Recent surveys indicate improvements in HIV and AIDS knowledge among young men in 9 countries and among young women in 13 countries. –EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015

Losing ground to HIV

HIV/AIDS continues to stymie progress in securing thriving educational systems. In countries severely affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, public funds are often diverted from a variety of sectors, including education, to fund the health sector.

- The education sector is particularly vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Studies show that HIV affects teacher absenteeism and educational quality. An impact assessment warns that HIV/AIDS could lead to a rise in the primary school pupil/teacher ratio from the 1997 level of 33.9:1 to above 50:1 in just under one decade. - The Socio-Economic Impact of HIV/AIDS in Swaziland, World Bank

- According to recent global estimates based on 119 countries that provided information, only 24% of young women and 36% of young men aged 15 to 24 were able to identify ways of preventing the

\(^{10}\) UNAIDS. 2014 Epidemiological slides – GAP report; 2014.
sexual transmission of HIV and to reject major misconceptions about HIV transmission. - UNESCO Report P. 84

• Worldwide, 3.2 million children under the age of 15 are living with HIV/AIDS – 91 percent of them in Sub-Saharan Africa. Young people aged 15-24 account for 33% percent of new HIV/AIDS infections.¹¹

• 13% of people worldwide who have HIV live in Sub-Saharan Africa. This region accounts for 68% of new HIV infections yearly.¹⁹

• HIV has increased the likelihood that children are pulled out of school to work or care for sick family members. Children orphaned by AIDS are even more likely to drop out of school and work in the informal sector or in the commercial sex trade.¹²

• Most people living with HIV or at risk for HIV do not have access to prevention, care, or treatment, and there is still no cure.¹⁹

**Fast Facts**

• Each day, 17,000 children die before reaching their 5th birthday, but children of mothers with a full primary education are 40 percent more likely to survive to age 5. – Save the Children, 2015

• The largest contributing factor to reducing child malnutrition has been the education of women – even more so than direct food aid. – Sahar, Education for Afghan Girls

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• Worldwide, 700,000 HIV cases could be prevented each year if all children received a primary education. – Basic Education Coalition, 2014

• Since 1990 the global under-five mortality rate has dropped 49 percent—from 90 (89, 92) deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 46 (44, 48) in 2013. All regions except Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania have reduced the rate by 52 percent or more. -Levels & Trends in Child Mortality, 2014

• 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills – equivalent to a 12% cut in world poverty. -EFA Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO, 2011