

Papers in the “**P**erspectives on...” series are written to explain the relevance of a particular topic to the international development assistance effort. Often the development process is painted in broad terms, sometimes even in sweepingly general ones: deprivation, governance, institutions, social safety net, infrastructure. It isn't always clear that these broad terms encompass a multitude of narrower topics, even though attention to narrower topics may be important in understanding the broader ones and may even provide a means for addressing them. In this sense, development is a mosaic of elements that fit together to constitute a whole. These papers look at the elements. None of these short papers is meant to analyze its topic, for that the reader is encouraged to go to other sources; instead, each is meant to clarify why that topic should be of concern to the international development practitioner.



erspective on

Education for Girls

– CSIDS –

strategies for development

the development mosaic
<http://www.grips@ac.jp/csids/index.html>

Poor girls in developing countries are not being educated at the rate at which they should be according to the UNICEF 2004 annual report, *The State of the World's Children*¹, subtitled *Girls, Education and Development*. Based on the information in that report, this paper explains briefly why the education of girls is a critical development issue. It so doing, it answers the following questions: What is the scope of the problem? Why are boys excluded from it? Why does it exist? What is being done to remedy it? What more should be done?

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More than 100 million children worldwide do not go to school and more than half of them are girls. Precise and reliable figures are hard to come by, but UNICEF, relying on enrollment data when it is available and household survey data when it is not, estimates that there are 65 million girls out of a total of 121 million children of primary school age who do not attend school.

One might wonder, here, about education for boys. A lot of boys are out of school as well – 56 million of them. There are even some parts of the world where boys' attendance in primary school is lower than that of girls. Sometimes this is because boys have out-of-school responsibilities, generally herding pasture animals while adult men pursue wage-earning work. Sometimes it is because boys do less well than girls and finally quit school. This is particularly the case in Latin America and the Caribbean, although there is also a “hidden” problem in developed countries of boys' underachievement.

The UNICEF report touches on this subject but its emphasis and focus is the problem of out-of-school girls, for two reasons:

¹ Released in December 2003 http://www.unicef.org/files/SOWC_04_eng.pdf



- 1 All of the measures recommended to improve the situation for girls will also benefit boys.
- 2 The education of girls can have a special, positive and broad impact on development as a whole.

According to United Nations Secretary General Kofi Anan, in his Foreword to the UNICEF report, "...there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls." There are three basic explanations for the significant impact of girls' education on development in general:

1. The issues that must be addressed to change the status quo for girls are symptomatic of the development obstacles in a society as a whole. These issues include such things as choices, opportunities, incentives and attitudes toward fundamental human rights.
2. Girls who are educated can directly redress many of the problems associated with poverty and underdevelopment such as child mortality, disease, and over-population, as well as education, itself. Educated girls are more aware of health, nutrition and family planning. They bear and raise fewer children and healthier children. They are also better able to manage their own health by avoiding abuse and protecting against AIDS than are their uneducated peers.
3. Girls are a large segment of the population and a valuable productive resource. Girls with education are better equipped to participate in the economy, either directly through their own work or indirectly through their support of family members.

The importance of education for girls is reflected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which emerged from the United Nations Millennium Summit of September 2000. These eight goals, and the eighteen targets associated with them, constitute the hub around which international development work currently revolves. Four Goals are related explicitly but non-specifically to education, children and gender:

- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4: Reduce Child mortality
- Goal 5: Improve maternal health



The MDG of universal primary education reaffirms the importance of primary education for boys as well as for girls. But there is also a Target, under Goal 3, calling specifically for the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005².

Despite the benefits that education for girls is likely to bring, there are a variety of reasons why they don't go to school:

- Some societies don't see the need for it. Girls may be responsible for maintaining the traditional way of life – the household, the children, the food, fuel and water – for which education is considered both unnecessary and unhelpful.
- In some situations, girls are needed at home, to help with the chores or care for other family members, such as younger siblings and old, sick or incapacitated people.
- Sometimes the financial outlay – in terms of fees, uniforms and/or supplies – is unaffordable.
- In some cases, girls are reluctant to go to school, out of fear of mistreatment or out of discomfort because the facilities, especially the sanitary facilities, are unacceptable.
- Education is sometimes considered to be a privilege, rather than a right, so that participation is not actively promoted – especially among lower socio-economic groups.

The Millennium Summit is not the first international conference to propose an objective of universal primary education. There is a long history of pro-education campaigns by the international community, led by UNESCO and UNICEF and now the World Bank.

The bellwether conference was held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. This conference, sponsored by UNESCO, adopted the goal of achieving universal primary education by 2000 under the campaign "Education for ALL (EFA)." A decade later a meeting was held in Dakar, Senegal to reaffirm commitment to the Education for All goals but it pushed back to 2015 the timeframe for universal primary education because the original target proved to be unrealistic. Also at Dakar, the goal of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 was articulated³.

In 2002, the World Bank introduced a Fast Track Initiative (FTI) to Education for All in an attempt to inject more energy into the EFA program. This initiative focused on identifying countries with good education policies but insufficient

² The Millennium Development Goals and associated Targets can be found on the UN website:
<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

³ Information on these conferences can be found at the UNESCO EFA website:
http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/index.shtml

financial means and then channeling increased funds to them. The World Bank FTI has stalled because donor commitments have not materialized⁴.

Indeed, as with many development objectives, money is an issue for achieving education goals. The cost of achieving the MDG of universal primary education by 2015 is estimated (by the World Bank) to be \$10-\$15 billion in additional funds per year, or more⁵. This is about 11% of what developing countries, themselves, spend annually on primary education. Though there are some tentative programs by donors to increase the amount now provided, this takes time to implement and sometimes does not get beyond the talking stage. The separate cost of increasing the education of girls is not available.

The push to put all children into primary school, and the added stipulation that all children complete primary school (many who enter do not finish), indicates the importance of universal education from the development perspective. Girls' education as a specifically development issue in its own right is emphasized less than universal education. Nonetheless, because of the special role of girls in development, as noted above, and because of the high human rights value of education, the education of girls should be part of a viable development strategy.



There is some work in progress to incorporate girl's education into development strategies. The Dakar conference of 2000 launched a United Nations 10-Year Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). Its purpose is to mobilize UN and international development agencies to help countries set and meet goals. Another effort is the Partnership for Sustainable Strategies on Girls' Education⁶ (consisting of the UK Department for International Development, the World Bank and UNICEF); it identifies policies and helps governments to implement them.

The most highly recommended approach to girls' education is to mainstream gender equality throughout an entire education system. A number of bilateral aid donors have formal policies that call for gender to be mainstreamed into all education programs. In 1999 the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), whose members are the major bilateral aid donors, analyzed the practices, methodologies and tools of eight bilateral donors and UNESCO and published the results as *Reaching the Goals in the S-21⁷: Gender, Equality and Education*⁸. It found that the following factors are important:

- Multiple delivery systems;
- Parental and community awareness and support;
- Attention to local situations and preferences;

⁴ Refer to the World Bank Development Committee Report of March 2004 for information: [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DEVCOMMINT/Documentation/20190709/DC2004-0002\(E\)-EFA.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DEVCOMMINT/Documentation/20190709/DC2004-0002(E)-EFA.pdf)

⁵ There are so many variables in projecting costs that the findings cannot be very precise.

⁶ <http://www.girlseducation.org/Welcomelow.asp>

⁷ S-21 is a reference to the OECD policy document, *Shaping the 21st Century*.

⁸ <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/10/39/2754713.pdf>

- Curricula which meet students' gender specific needs;
- Improved teacher quality;
- Increased number of female teachers;
- Reduced financial burden on parents;
- Establishment of equitable scholarship programs;
- Women's participation in decentralized decision making and management.

The concept embodied by this approach is that the key to achieving gender equality (or parity) in education is to build a good educational system and then to insure that girls are included (mainstreamed) in it.

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Appendix

Among the countries most at risk, the 25 listed below meet one, or more, of the following criteria:

- Low enrollment rates for girls
- Gender gaps of more than 10 per cent in primary education
- More than 1 million girls out of school
- On the World Bank's Education For all Fast Track Initiative
- Crises that affect girls' educational opportunities, such as HIV/AIDS or conflict

Afghanistan

Bangladesh

Benin

Bhutan

Bolivia

Burkina Faso

Central African

Republic

Chad

Congo, DR

Djibouti

Eritrea

Ethiopia

Guinea

India

Malawi

Mali

Nepal

Nigeria

Pakistan

Papua New

Guinea

Sudan

Tanzania

Turkey

Yemen

Zambia