

## **XVIII. ADDRESSING THE MDGS AND TARGETS FOR EDUCATION AND GENDER COMMENTS ON SELECTED ASPECTS LINKED TO THE ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION**

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### MDGS AND TARGETS FOR EDUCATION AND GENDER

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education: *(Target 3: Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling)*

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women: *(Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and to all levels of education no later than 2015)*

#### A. BACKGROUND

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) present a set of eight interlinked goals and accompanying targets which together aim at rooting out poverty, with the ambitious aim of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. Integrated approaches are critical to ensuring that poverty is addressed in all of its multiple dimensions—social, economic, and political—including through a focus on capacity-building and empowerment of poor people as actors in their own development.

As a tool for empowerment and sustainable development, education serves as a door to the overarching goal of poverty reduction, with girls' education a key to unlocking its full transformative potential. This is indeed recognized in the MDGs and targets for education and gender which take up the World Education Forum's Education-for-All goals of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015 as well as ensuring that, by 2015, all children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. These targets are echoed in the *World Fit For Children* outcome document of the 2002 Special Session for Children (A/RES/S-27/2), and are enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child which recognizes the right of all children everywhere to a quality education. It is widely recognized that without success on the education goals, prospects for achievement of the other international goals are in jeopardy.

This is why UNICEF, as lead agency of the United National Girls' Education Initiative, is spearheading partnerships and programme approaches to accelerate progress on the 2005 gender parity goal, which is seen as the first test of credibility of international commitment to the MDGs as whole. Education is also a prominent feature in the ICPD Programme of Action (United Nations, 1995) as well as the ICPD+5 Key actions for the further implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action (United Nations, 1999), where the linkages between population, education and development are strongly articulated and the importance of education for women is particularly highlighted.

#### B. THE MULTIPLIER EFFECTS OF EDUCATION, PARTICULARLY FOR GIRLS

As a basic right, education is an intrinsic good in itself, leading to broadened individual capacities and freedoms. It is also associated with a host of positive development outcomes—interacting in this way

with other factors to contribute to the achievement of a number of related MDGs. Improved access to education for girls in particular is one dimension of empowerment which helps break the inter-generational transmission of poverty and serves as a catalyst for human development overall.

Data from around the world show that increased education is associated with the empowerment of women, with multiplier effects that spread to society at large. Clear and compelling evidence links education—particularly maternal education—with lower child mortality, better child health and nutrition, higher life expectancy, and lowered fertility. Education is also a key means of empowering girls against HIV/AIDS, giving them the knowledge and self-confidence needed to protect themselves in what are often unequal gender relations. Recent research demonstrates the importance of girls' education in preventing the transmission of HIV/AIDS and delaying early marriage and sexual activity (Kane, 2004). Educated women are also more likely to value education and send their own children to school, enhancing further the positive spiral of development.

Expanding opportunities for education for all can help stimulate productivity and reduce the economic vulnerability of poor households: given women's extensive and growing participation in productive activities, the education of girls and women becomes a particularly critical investment. Education also underpins the practice of democratic citizenship, tolerance and respect for diversity and lays the foundation for accountable governance. For girls and women in particular, education can be a pivotal catalyst out of gendered patterns of discrimination, a springboard by which they may claim their rightful place in society and development.

#### THE BENEFITS OF GIRLS' EDUCATION

- An extra year of education for girls can reduce infant mortality by 5-10 per cent, with the link especially strong in low income countries (Schultz, 1993)
- In Africa, children of mothers who have 5 years of primary education are 40 per cent more likely to live beyond age 5 (Summers, 1994)
- A 65-country analysis finds that doubling the proportion of women with a secondary education would reduce average fertility rates from 5.3 to 3.9 per woman (Subbarao and Raney, 1995)
- Providing girls with one extra year of education beyond the average boosts eventual wages by 10-20 per cent (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2002)
- A 63-country study finds that more productive farming due to increased female education accounts for 43 per cent of the decline in malnutrition achieved between 1970 and 1995 (Smith and Haddad, 1999)
- A recent cross-country study finds that women's education generally has more impact than men's education on children's schooling (Filmer, 2000)
- In Brazil, women's resources have 20 times the impact on children's health compared with men's resources (Thomas, 1990)
- Young rural Ugandans with secondary education are three times less likely to be HIV positive than those with no education. (De Walque, 2004)
- Research in India finds that women with some formal schooling are more likely to resist violence than women with no schooling (Sen, 1999)
- Educated Bangladeshi women are three times as likely to participate in political meetings as illiterate women (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2000)

(summarized from Herz and Sperling, 2004, 3-6)

Based on the growing body of empirical evidence, it has been estimated that countries that fail to meet the MDG on gender are likely to face considerable costs in terms of foregone economic growth (0.1–0.3 per cent lower per capita growth) as well as reduced rates of reduction in fertility (0.1–0.4 more children per women); child mortality (an average of 14/1000 higher rates of under-five mortality); and under-nutrition (2.4 percentage points higher prevalence of underweight children under age five) (Abu Gaida and Klasen, 2002). Universal basic education of good quality without discrimination is thus unquestionably a key to reducing both the structural causes of poverty and its effects and to building processes for sustained and equitable development. Achieving the education targets is thus crucial for the achievement of the other MDGs.

### C. EDUCATION AS A KEY COMPONENT OF THE ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION

The ICPD Programme of Action reaffirms education as a right for all children and emphasizes in particular the benefits of education for women. The Programme of Action points to the inter-linkages between population, development and education and recommends a set of interdependent quantitative goals and objectives, including universal access to primary education, with special attention to closing the gender gap in primary and secondary school education. The ICPD+5 Key actions for the further implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action call on Governments and civil society, with the assistance of the international community, to meet the goal of universal access to primary education and eliminate the gender gap in primary and secondary education by 2005, with an interim target set for net primary school enrolments for all children, and special efforts to increase the retention rates of girls in primary and secondary school. It also calls for actions to reduce illiteracy, especially among women, and for attention to both formal and non-formal education, including expanded youth and adult education, and special attention to the needs of adolescents.

ICPD para. 11.2. “Education is a key factor in sustainable development: it is at the same time a component of well-being and a factor in the development of well-being through its links with demographic as well as economic and social factors. Education is also a means to enable the individual to gain access to knowledge, which is a precondition for coping, by anyone wishing to do so, with today’s complex world. The reduction of fertility, morbidity and mortality rates, the empowerment of women, the improvement in the quality of the working population and the promotion of genuine democracy are largely assisted by progress in education...”

### D. MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACHES FOR POSITIVE SYNERGY

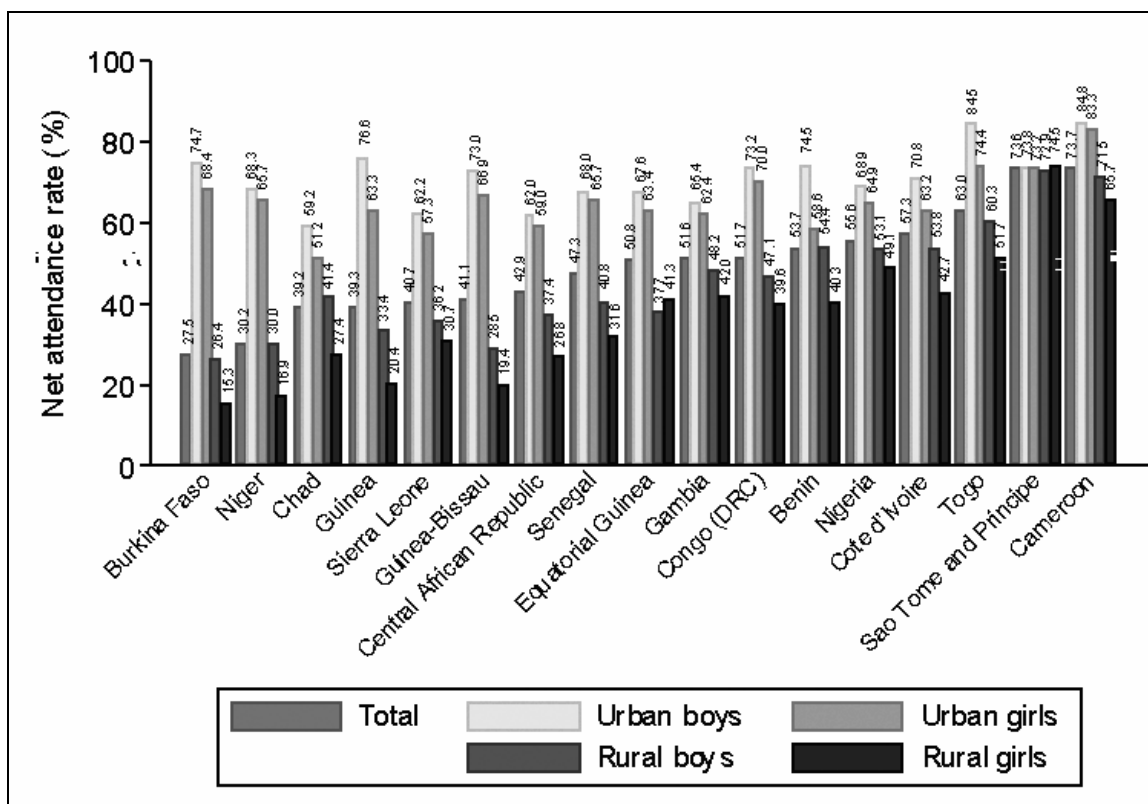
Addressing the multiple barriers faced by girls in their efforts to access quality education and to persist in school necessarily leads to integrated, multi-sectoral approaches that involve numerous partners and aim at creating positive synergies for children. This goes to the heart of the integrated efforts that are required to achieve the MDGs as a whole. For example, children who are sick or malnourished are unable to participate fully in education or to learn to their full potential. In addition, sickness or death of other family members may augment the demands on girls for care-giving and household management. This is a particularly acute problem in the case of HIV/AIDS which, in addition, leads many children orphaned and stigmatized and devastates entire education systems. Health, hygiene and nutrition education and services, such as Vitamin A supplementation and de-worming services, along with life-skills-based education are therefore important components in programmes designed to enhance learning outcomes and empower girls.

Other intersectoral interventions are equally important. Early child care development opportunities are important in stimulating early learning and psycho-social development, as well as in

freeing up girls' time from childcare for younger siblings so that they may instead attend school. Clean water and appropriate sanitation facilities are essential elements in attracting children to school and keeping them there, with separate sanitation for girls a particularly important factor for the retention in school of adolescent girls with the onset of menstruation. Policies and programmes aimed at creating protective environments are vital in addressing safety and security issues in and around the schools—including gender-based violence—and in combating various forms of exploitation. Measures to safeguard the education rights of pregnant girls or adolescent mothers are also important. UNICEF maintains that while all of these factors are pivotal for girls, they also help to create quality learning conditions for boys, and thus need to be pursued in the interest of all children. Many such intersectoral approaches and synergies are highlighted in the ICPD Programme of Action and its follow-up.

Particular educational needs accrue to particular population groups, as, for example, the case of orphans mentioned above, or disabled children. Education systems, working with communities and through both formal and non-formal channels, need to be responsive to such needs so that the right to education is realized by all. The effects of armed conflict and crises, leading to trauma, disruption and massive displacement of populations, call for an appropriate response through education that can provide a safe haven for children and help re-establish a sense of normalcy and hope. Education can also contribute to national reconstruction in post-conflict situations and can help reinstate and reinforce values supporting tolerance, gender sensitivity and peace. The ICPD Programme of Action recognizes the particular educational needs of refugees and internally displaced populations as well as other vulnerable groups.

Figure XVIII.1. Disparity in net primary school attendance rates: Western and Central Africa



Source: UNICEF analysis of Demographic and Health Survey and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey data 1998-2001.

## E. THE IMPORTANCE OF TIMELY, RELIABLE, AND DISAGGREGATED DATA

The importance of gender-disaggregated data as a basis for programme planning, implementation and monitoring is well recognized, including in the ICPD Programme of Action, which sets out specific objectives to strengthen capacity for data collection and analysis by age, sex, ethnicity and geographic areas. This is particularly important in efforts to reduce disparities in education, with gender often intertwining with other sources of disparity to create a situation of double disadvantage. Data from recent household surveys in 36 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, reveal that only 52 per cent of rural children attend primary school, compared to 73 per cent of urban children. In six of the countries, more than 7 out of 10 rural children were not attending school. Within the urban/rural disparities, girls are often the most deprived, as illustrated on the accompanying figure of comparative net primary school attendance rates for selected countries in Western and Central Africa. Similar patterns may be found in an analysis of data by household wealth, pointing to the clear need to both analyze and embed education policies within overall poverty reduction strategies.

Overall improvements in the timeliness, reliability and usage of education data drawn from a variety of sources are important for informed policy-making. Given the ever-increasing population of young people, coupled with the demographic effects of external shocks such as HIV/AIDS and armed conflicts, proper planning of infrastructure needs and teaching force requirements are dependent upon accurate population statistics and education data. With current estimates of the number of primary-aged children out-of-school ranging from around 104 million (UNESCO, 2004) to 121 million (UNICEF, 2003), it is important to consolidate the data base to more accurately and consistently target the areas of greatest need. By all accounts, on the global level, the regions of highest educational deprivation are sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, which together account for some three quarters of the out-of-school primary-aged population. As the demand for post-primary education grows throughout the world, it will be equally important to target this age group with appropriate policies and programmes based on reliable data and statistics.

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