

Why is Education for All So Important?

What is Education for All and What Progress Have We Made?

Education for All (EFA) is a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children. EFA was launched at the World Conference on Education for All in 1990. Education for All is also goal #2 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) — eight internationally agreed-upon goals that serve as the blueprint for cutting extreme poverty in half.

Of the 75 million primary-aged children not in school, 55 percent are girls, roughly three-quarters live in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, and some 40 million are in conflict-affected countries or emerging states. Tens of millions more children drop out of school before grade five because schools are overcrowded, unsafe, poorly equipped, poorly managed and have inadequately trained teachers. If current trends continue, 58 out of the 86 countries that have not yet achieved universal primary enrollment will fail to do so by 2015.

Standing between these children and the classroom is a lack of funding for quality basic education to help them overcome the barriers to school such as tuition fees, disabilities, lack of sanitation, and poorly qualified teachers. The U.S. and other countries must do more to support countries to eliminate school fees and other barriers to education and work in closer partnership with poor countries that have committed to providing education for all children.

Why is Education So Important?

Education is a basic human right and a significant factor in the development of children, communities, and countries. Opening classroom doors to all children, especially girls, will help break the intergenerational chains of poverty because education is intrinsically linked to all development goals, such as supporting gender empowerment, improving child health and maternal health, reducing hunger, fighting the spread of HIV and diseases of poverty, spurring economic growth, and building peace.

Education Empowers Women and Girls

- Particularly for women and girls, the economic and personal empowerment that education provides allows them to make healthier choices for themselves and their families.
- Benefits of girls' education include not only the reducing the impact of HIV/AIDS, but reduction of poverty, improvement of the health of women and their children, delay of marriage, reduction of female genital cutting, and increase in self-confidence and decision-making power.¹

¹ UNFPA. Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis. Available at: <http://www.unfpa.org/hiv/women/report/chapter5.html>.

- On average, for a girl in a poor country, each additional year of education beyond grades three or four will lead to 20 percent higher wages and a 10 percent decrease in the risk of her own children dying of preventable causes.²

Education Contributes to Improving Child Survival and Maternal Health³

- A child born to an educated mother is more than twice as likely to survive to the age of five as a child born to an uneducated mother.
- Educated mothers are 50 percent more likely to immunize their children than mothers with no schooling.
- Women with six or more years of education are more likely to seek prenatal care, assisted childbirth, and postnatal care, reducing the risk of maternal and child mortality and illness.

Education Helps Reduce Hunger⁴

- Expanding education for girls is one of the most powerful ways to fight hunger.⁵ Gains in women's education made the most significant difference in reducing malnutrition, out-performing a simple increase in the availability of food. A 63-country study by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) found that more productive farming as a result of female education accounted for 43 percent of the decline in malnutrition achieved between 1970 and 1995.
- Crop yields in Kenya could rise up to 22 percent if women farmers had the same education and inputs (such as fertilizer, credit, investment) as men farmers.⁶

Education Contributes to the Fight against HIV/AIDS

- Educated people are healthier people. HIV/AIDS infection rates are halved among young people who finish primary school. If every girl and boy received a complete primary education, at least 7 million new cases of HIV could be prevented in a decade.⁷
- A Ugandan study showed that rural Ugandans with secondary education have a 75 percent lower rate of HIV infection than those with no education.⁸

² "What Works in Girls' Education." Barbara Herz and Gene B. Sperling, Senior Fellow for Economic Policy and Director of the Center for Universal Education, April 2004. http://www.cfr.org/publication/6947/what_works_in_girls_education.html

³ "The Economic and Human Development Costs of Missing the Millennium Development Goal on Gender Equity." World Bank Discussion Paper 29710. D. Abu-Ghaida and S. Klasen. (Washington: World Bank, 2004)

⁴ "Explaining Child Malnutrition in Developing Countries." International Food Policy Research Institute Research Report No.111. L. Smith and L. Haddad. (Washington DC: International Food Policy Research Institute).

⁵ "Hunger Report 2005." Bread for the World. <http://www.bread.org/learn/hunger-reports/hunger-report-2005-executive-summary.html>.

⁶ UNFPA, UN Population Fund, State of World Population 2005: The Promise of Equality. UNFPA, New York, 2005, p. 47

⁷ "Learning to Survive: How education for all would save millions of young people from HIV/AIDS." *Global Campaign for Education*. (London: GCE, 2004).

⁸ What Works in Girls' Education.

- The ability of girls to avoid HIV infection is so strongly associated with attendance at school that education is known as a “social vaccine” against the virus. A Zambian study found that AIDS spread twice as fast among uneducated as among educated girls.⁹

Education Helps Fight Poverty & Spur Economic Growth

- Education is a prerequisite for short and long-term economic growth: No country has achieved continuous and rapid economic growth without at least 40 percent of adults being able to read and write.¹⁰
- Failing to offer girls the same educational opportunity as boys costs developing countries \$92 billion each year, according to a study by Plan International. That's \$1 trillion per decade in forgone earnings and unnecessary costs.¹¹
- A person’s earnings increase by 10 percent for each year of schooling they receive, translating to a one percent annual increase in GDP if good quality education is offered to the entire population.¹²
- Then chief economist of the World Bank and current top economic advisor for President Obama, Lawrence Summers, asserted that “educating girls’ yields a higher rate of return than any other investment available in the developing world.”¹³

Education Provides a Foundation for Peace Building

Education is a critical building block for the development of an inclusive, democratic society and must be a central component of U.S. efforts to promote global security.

- Education nourishes peace. Across society, every year of schooling decreases a male’s chance of engaging in violent conflict by 20 percent.¹⁴
- The 9/11 Commission Report stresses the link between strong U.S. leadership against extreme poverty and creating security: “We should offer an example of moral leadership in the world, committed to treat people humanely, abide by the rule of law, and be generous and caring to our neighbors. America and Muslim friends can agree on respect for human dignity and opportunity. To Muslim parents, terrorists like Bin Laden have nothing to offer their children but visions of violence and death. America and its friends have a crucial advantage — we can offer these

⁹ What Works in Girls’ Education.

¹⁰ “Millions Miss Out.” Global Campaign for Education. <http://www.campaignforeducation.org/en/why-education-for-all/millionsmissout>

¹¹ “Paying the Price: The Economic Cost of Failing to Educate Girls.” Plan International. (Plan International, 2008). <http://plan-international.org/about-plan/resources/publications/education/cover-of-school-improvement-program-paying-the-price-the-economic-cost-of-failing-to-educate-girls>

¹² “Education on the Brink: Will the IMF’s new lease on life ease or block progress towards education goals?” Global Campaign for Education. 2009. http://www.campaignforeducation.org/docs/reports/IMF%20paper2_low%20res.pdf.

¹³ Investing in All the People: Educating Women in Developing Countries. Lawrence H. Summers. (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1994.

¹⁴ Save the Children. September 2009. <http://www.savethechildren.org/newsroom/2009/rtf-threeyears.html>

parents a vision that might give their children a better future.... That vision of the future should stress life over death: individual educational and economic opportunity.”¹⁵

- Former U.N. Ambassador Bill Richardson underscored the importance of education in fighting extremism in a 2008 Foreign Affairs article: “A crucial effort in fighting terrorism must be support for public education in the Muslim world, which is the best way to mitigate the role of those madrassas that foment extremism. Development alleviates the injustice and lack of opportunity that proponents of violence and terrorism exploit.”¹⁶

¹⁵ What to Do? A Global Strategy.” National Commission on Terrorist Attacks on the United States. http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report_Ch12.htm

¹⁶ “A New Realism.” Bill Richardson. *Foreign Affairs*. January/February 2008. <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20080101faessay87111/bill-richardson/a-new-realism.html>