

Educate and Empower

Investing in Women and Girls Means Investing in a Better World

Today, 72 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.

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, more than half of the world's 72 million out-of-school children are girls.

Fast Facts

- One extra year of education increases a person's wages approximately 10 percent. For girls, the rate of return for one additional year of primary education is as high as 15 percent.
- In Sub-Saharan Africa, investing in education of women has the potential to boost agricultural output by 25 percent.
- In Africa alone, 4.5 million children die each year before reaching their 5th birthday, but children of mothers with a full primary education are 40 percent more likely to survive to age 5.

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

Women and girls make up nearly 70 percent of the poor worldwide. 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 (40.5% globally in 2008), 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.
- Gains are even higher at the secondary level. For every additional year of secondary schooling, a girl's future wages increase by up to 18 percent.
- When women control the family budget, they are more likely than men to invest in children's health and well-being.

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.
- 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.
- 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.

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.

- The largest contributing factor to reducing child malnutrition has been the education of women – even more so than direct food aid.
- 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 Nigeria, children of mothers without an education have about a 2.5 times higher risk of death than children of mothers with a secondary education.
- Children of mothers with a primary education are 50 percent more likely to be immunized.

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.
- Preliminary studies show that girls' enrollment in secondary education is positively correlated with more women being elected to seats in national parliaments.