

5 WHAT ABOUT BOYS?



Making schools and education systems more gender sensitive and girl friendly does not render them any less attractive or comfortable for boys. Quite the reverse is true. In practice, almost all of the reforms undertaken to make the educational experience safer, more relevant and more empowering for girls also help boys. Indeed, promoting girls' education holds strategic advantages for meeting the goals of Education For All, and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

All children – not only girls – benefit, for example, from the expansion and development of integrated early childhood programmes. Similarly, while scheduling lessons flexibly so as to include children required to work in the home or the family fields may benefit girls most, it also makes school possible for boys all over the world who work either in or outside their home and would otherwise be denied the opportunity. When schools are located closer to children's homes it makes them more accessible to girls and renders the journey to school less of a concern for them and their parents – and it makes getting to school easier for boys, too.

The same applies to the provision of water and latrines in schools, or to ensuring the care and maintenance of school buildings. A violence-free school environment is also of clear advantage to boys as well as girls since the school playground can be a brutal place in which physical weakness is exploited and outsiders can be victimized and bullied. With this in mind, making schools safe is a cause pursued as passionately on behalf of boys as of girls.

More fundamentally still, a key element in advancing girls' education is the development of child-friendly, gender-conscious teaching methods that reach out to children's individual needs. Girls may need this change in educational approach more than their boy peers, but what it translates into is better, more sensitive



Cristina Uza/UNICEF/2003

and child-centred teaching for all children, and an improved learning experience for boys as well.

An extensive evaluation by USAID in eight countries concluded that boys have consistently benefited from programmes and policies to improve girls' education.⁷³ Not only did boys as well as girls benefit from initiatives to improve school quality, but boys' enrolment also increased together with that of girls. Boys face many of the same problems as girls: restricted access, poor quality, lack of nearby schools and the absence of parental support for education. When these are addressed in order to get more girls into school, boys – especially those from vulnerable or marginalized groups – also reap the reward.

To a large extent, the cause of developing gender-sensitive education systems worldwide

benefits boys as well as girls. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that in some countries and regions – including much of the industrialized world – it is boys' academic underachievement and disaffection with school that are causing concern.

Boys left out

In a minority of countries, there are fewer boys than girls enrolled in school. A recent UNICEF study of household data from 55 countries confirms that while in a clear majority of countries girls' attendance at school is far lower than boys', in some countries boys are the ones not being reached by the education system. (See *Box 5: Male/Female net school attendance*). In countries such as Botswana, Lesotho, Mongolia and Namibia, this is largely due to a practice of

Using theatre, sports and poetry workshops, teachers and community leaders educated boys and girls alike and reached the wider community with key messages.



having boys look after family cattle while the men seek wage-earning work. But in most parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, which has no such ingrained pastoral tradition, the same underperformance and even disappearance of boys is evident in the school system.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, boys generally have higher repetition rates and lower academic achievement levels than girls, and in some countries, a higher rate of absenteeism. In Brazil in 1996, men had an average of 5.7 years of formal education compared with 6.0 years for women.⁷⁴ Gender disparity starts to show up around age 10 for boys, when they begin to leave school at a higher rate than girls. At ages 15 to 17, 19.2 per cent of boys have dropped out altogether, compared with only 8.5 per cent of girls.⁷⁵

BOX 5

MALE/FEMALE NET SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Colombia	0.81
Haiti	0.84
Lesotho	0.45
Madagascar	0.82
Malawi	0.84
Mongolia	0.82
Suriname	0.73
Tanzania, United Republic of	0.81

(Among children aged 7 to 14)

Source: UNICEF, 2003

PANEL 9

Turkey: A school play touches a nation

The young woman on the stage talks directly to the audience. "I don't want just to work on my trousseau. I want to go to school and have my books." The atmosphere is electric. Çiğdem Yıldız is only saying what she has told her own parents countless times as she watched other children going to school, begging to be allowed to follow in their footsteps.

In her region of south-eastern Turkey, in the province of Van, girls are raised to work in the home and prepare for early marriage. Instead of writing their dreams down on paper, Çiğdem and girls like her learn to reflect them in their embroidery, in the designs of the rugs that are a staple product of the area. They

learn to be silent, but this silence is shattered tonight in the auditorium. Çiğdem may be playing a part, but it is a part drawn from her own life.

Çiğdem thought her opportunity to learn had long passed her by and she was determined that her younger sisters Gurbet and Esma should not lose out in the same way. Then her own chance came in the shape of an open primary school learning centre, opened in the local district of Muradiye in 2000. This was one of a network of centres established across five provinces following a successful pilot project initiated with the Turkey Development Foundation, International Labour Organization, United Nations Development Programme, United

Nations Population Fund and UNICEF.

The centres aim to give a second chance to girls who have not completed their compulsory primary schooling – as well as to release them from the burden of domestic work in their own families. They were encouraged to enrol in open primary school and were given support with their homework. The centres were equipped with computers, overhead projectors, video players and television sets.

For girls who had rarely had the opportunity to get out of their homes, the centres functioned not only as learning centres but as social places where they could share their

The crunch point for boys often comes in early adolescence, at the point where their bodies and their sense of themselves are changing, where they are being forced to engage with the adult world and its expectations of them.

Anderson, for example, lives in a favela in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Now in his late teens, he has decided to make a go of school but looks back on the time in his early teens when hanging out with his male friends on the street or playing football was much more cool and enticing than anything he could experience at school.

“You know, when you’re younger, you don’t want to worry about anything, just goofing off. My mother would call me to go to school and I would say that I wasn’t going. And I’d take off running because there was no man at the house...a man who could run after me and

catch me and make me go to school. My mother couldn’t catch me. Today, now that I’m older... I’m gonna study. Without an education...it’s already hard.”⁷⁶

Anderson’s testimony sheds light on a problem that is not only more apparent throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, but that has increasing resonance in Western countries – that of boys who become disaffected with school and academic work during adolescence.

Boys left behind

For decades, the problem of boys’ educational underachievement in industrialized countries remained a hidden problem. It was generally accepted that girls outperformed boys in language and humanities subjects, but as long

life experiences and their concerns as well as explore wider horizons. The girls organized field trips to nearby provinces. For many, this was the first time they had left the familiar surroundings of their own neighbourhoods.

The Muradiye centre that Çiğdem attended exceeded all expectations. The girls – Adalet, Ayper, Çiğdem, Gurbet, Nezaket, Yeter and others – organized a drama club, reached out to boys in the area and together wrote and staged a play based on their own life experience called *Kardelen*.

The title *Kardelen* is symbolic. It is the name of the flower that blooms through the mountain snow. The play examines the cultural practices that limit the lives of girls in south-east Turkey. It is a collage of real-life experiences, of the early marriages and traditional practices that keep women from participating fully in their communities. But the play is full of hope, as the girls fight against adversity and bloom, like the *karde-len* flower.

The play was first shown to the girls’ mothers and won their support. It was then staged for a wider audience in the provincial capital and was such a big success that the girls were featured on the regional television channel. It was performed twice more in the national capital, first for a drama festival, then as part of a children’s forum where they performed for children from all around Turkey, as well as for the Ministers of Education and Culture. Some scenes from the play were aired on national television.

The play allowed the girls to express their frustrations at being kept from school. It opened the eyes of parents who, steeped in tradition, kept girls at home to help with housework. It transformed attitudes across the country.

Most of all, it has transformed the girls themselves. Before *Kardelen* they were primary-school dropouts; now they are confident young women who want to become teachers, doctors and lawyers. One of them, Ayper Sara, says she will not stop at the middle-school diploma but will

try for high school and even university. “We want this,” she says, “not for hanging a diploma on our walls but so that we can be educated and informed mothers ourselves who will not let our daughters miss what we have missed.”

Çiğdem’s sister Gurbet did not make it to school either, but at the Muradiye centre she says she realized how much a person can grow by learning a single letter; she even enjoyed the smell of paper and pencil. She too is part of the *Kardelen* cast, and the two girls have opened a door within their own family. The play’s message came through to their parents, and their younger sister Esma is now in high school.

The Turkish Ministry of Education is also listening. It has adopted the open-primary-school model as its principal strategy for enabling girls to complete their compulsory education. Çiğdem and her friends have not only thrown off the dead weight of low expectations in their own lives – they have blazed a trail for others to follow.

as boys achieved better results in mathematics and science it was assumed that there was an overall balance. In recent years, however, girls' participation and performance in science and mathematics have significantly improved, due not just to school-based initiatives but also to wider changes in social expectations of women's roles. Boys' performance in language-based subjects has, however, not improved, with the result that girls have a better record across the board, as reflected in national tests from primary level through to public examinations at the end of school.

This has prompted substantial concern at government level. In Australia, for example, the Parliamentary Education Committee held an extensive inquiry into boys' education that made 24 recommendations ranging from classroom level through to educational and social policy. The recommendations included promoting strategies that teachers can use to effectively engage all boys and girls, and making the issue of gender and achievement part of pre-service and in-service teacher education.⁷⁷

In the United Kingdom, the Government has, since 1998, required all local education authorities to produce long-term strategies to counteract boys' underachievement, and for their progress to be regularly evaluated.⁷⁸ The Government commissioned a three-year research project to identify successful strategies for raising boys' achievement without detriment to girls' and maintains a website dedicated to providing case studies, resources and guidance for schools on how to set up a strategy to tackle underachievement by boys.⁷⁹

Disaffected boys

A growing number of studies is deepening our understanding of boys' educational underachievement. Researchers have different areas of emphasis but all would broadly agree with the Australian Parliament's report that the phenomenon is complex and has a range of causes. It is clear that school-based remedies will be insufficient on their own and that the prob-

lem, like that of girls' underachievement in the developing world, is inseparable from wider questions about gender and power.

One suggestion has been that girls' socialization in the home encourages them to concentrate and stay 'on task', meaning that they are more amenable to the classroom environment. Research from Jamaica, for example, where girls outperform boys at secondary and tertiary levels, suggests that boys there are generally allowed a significant degree of freedom outside their homes while girls are expected to stay at home, required to spend their time on specific tasks.⁸⁰ A study by the Jamaican Government showed that gender differences in achievement can be attributed to a range of factors from socialization by parents in early childhood through to gender-biased messages in society as a whole, and also to the fact that boys and girls were treated differently in the classroom.

Another potentially fruitful area for research and action connects schools with the wider question of social and sexual role-models: the gender balance of teachers. A key strategy in sub-Saharan Africa to make schools more attractive and appropriate for girls is to increase the proportion of women teachers in a region in which the profession is dominated by men. The reverse may be true in industrialized countries and in Latin America and the Caribbean where, particularly at primary level, women teachers form the vast majority, leaving a potential absence of positive role models for young boys.

Some researchers argue that one reason boys underperform so markedly in language and literature is that these are seen as 'girls' territory' and that reading is too often seen as 'unmanly'. As one seven-year-old British boy said when interviewed for television, "You are not a real boy if you like reading."⁸¹

Gender roles

All this suggests that boys' disaffection with education may be closely connected with their traditional socialization as males. It underlines

the importance of fathers being involved with their children from birth, participating in their care and development during early childhood and supporting their education. Schools and education systems, though, inevitably have to cope with boys who have experienced no such positive example within their own families, and who respond instead to society's negative messages that encourage violence and behaviour that puts them and girls at risk.

In Nigeria, the Conscientizing Male Adolescents programme has been working with teenage boys since 1995. The programme involves schoolboys committing to a year of weekly discussions with a specially trained teacher in which they talk about gender roles and how they play out in their own families, in a society where rape and violence against women are

areas of concern. The curriculum is continually developing. A few years ago, it became evident that the boys were having trouble distinguishing love from sexual desire, so a curriculum unit was added on 'men's responsibility in sexual relationships, love and marriage'. The programme has found that it is important to find ways of addressing the idea of masculinity that are not too abstract – by discussing, for example, how boys feel when they don't do well in sports, or when they are pressured by male peers to chase girls or to be 'macho'. It is inevitably somewhat self-selecting, since boys have to be sufficiently motivated in the first place to enrol in the discussion groups. Nevertheless, in its first 6 years 2,000 boys and young men graduated from the programme in the cities of Calabar and Uyo, and in 2002 more than 700 boys were enrolled. Boys who have

Gender sensitivity means creating school systems, classrooms and societies in which girls as well as boys flourish.



graduated have gained significant skills in discussion and self-expression, which mark them out as 'stars', meaning that they are also likely to be seen as role models by others.

Boys as strategic allies

Boys can themselves be empowered and their own social and educational development extended by participating in attempts to protect and promote girls' rights. This has been evident in Uganda, where the Girls' Education Movement has, from its inception, involved boys as strategic allies. Girls in Kibale and Mbarara districts, for instance, established their local clubs and chapters in partnership with boys, working together to identify out-of-school children by name and location and then seeking them out. Boys have been particularly valuable in address-

ing girls' security and safety issues during the commute to and from school – and also while they are in school.⁸² Given that the violence girls face comes from boys as well as men, the recruitment of boys as active allies in combating the problem has clear advantages for girls. But there is also an undeniable benefit to boys' own social development in their confronting violence and understanding why it is unacceptable.

In Pakistan, too, adolescent boys are active and effective partners in promoting the rights of girls and women.⁸³ A project aimed at empowering adolescent girls has been running for over 6 years, and has reached 25,000 girls in 500 locations across Pakistan. The project met with significant success in providing knowledge, skills and new opportunities for girls. But over time the girls who were benefiting from the project

PANEL 10

Sudan: The community that made a difference

Along the dusty, rugged pathways that trickle across El-Geneina in West Darfur, an area of Sudan near the border with Chad, a slim, bright-eyed 11-year-old girl leads an impressive procession of three donkeys. The first is so overloaded with yellow grass that only its spindly legs and doleful eyes can be seen; the other two strain under their heavy cargoes of firewood and water. This slight, shy girl is UM-Jumma Abdullahi, who contributes to her family's income by making daily 10-kilometre expeditions to collect grass for sale in the market. Two days' work gathering these yellow stalks, used for thatching fences and mats, will earn her less than a dollar.

It is not surprising that UM-Jumma missed out on primary schooling:

Sudan has one of the lowest girls' net enrolment rates in the world (42 per cent), the state of West Darfur has a much lower rate (22 per cent) and in this locality things are worse still, with only 1 per cent of girls attending school.

But change is in the air – change that is showing how community involvement in girls' education can make all the difference. The Sudanese Government and UNICEF have launched the Child-Friendly Community Initiative, which has resulted in over 378 such communities in the 9 most disadvantaged states of the north and 3 accessible urban areas in the south, taking the lead in building schools, supporting teachers and monitoring school activities.

Under the alliance, UNICEF provides some support for school rehabilitation or construction, classroom furniture, teaching and learning materials, and training of teachers. The World Food Programme provides cooking utensils and food supplies to ensure that over 40,000 children in 6 states have access to a daily meal in school. In addition, they contribute to the construction of school latrines and sanitation facilities. The curriculum integrates basic issues of health and hygiene, reinforced by health clubs that also remind children about the importance of vaccinations and that have recently started awareness sessions on HIV/AIDS.

Alongside this broad-based education, latrines are provided, as are

made it known that they felt boys in their communities were starting to lag behind and recommended that the project be opened up to allow boys' participation.

In response, the training package for girls was modified appropriately for boys, and leaders were identified at each location whose skills were then developed, enabling them to guide follow-up activities and report progress. The object of including boys was to provide them with knowledge that would not only empower them but also help them acknowledge their new roles and enable them to understand and support girls' rights. The initiative was successfully piloted before being rolled out to 45 locations across all 4 provinces of the country. The initial response from the boys involved is encouraging. They have become more sup-

portive of girls and have begun to get involved in constructive community-development activities.

Poverty's role

In the Caribbean, governments have become increasingly aware that boys and young men are more likely to be alienated from school if they come from poor socio-economic circumstances. There have been some interventions aimed specifically at such young males, such as the Youth Empowerment and Skills Training programme in the Bahamas, which targets those having trouble with the curriculum, and the Uplifting Adolescents Project in Jamaica, which focuses on the young unemployed outside the school system.⁸⁴

handpumps to provide safe drinking water. "In the past these latrines would have been the last consideration for schools," says Mohamed Musa Hajj, a director of schools in El-Geneina, "but now they understand that adequate sanitation is not only important for their children at school but also within the home."

A single water-pump at school can have far-reaching effects on the home. Every day 11-year-old Awatif Ahmed Mutallah fills bottles of clean, safe drinking water from the pump at school and takes them home with her. Each bottle is designated for a specific household purpose such as drinking, brewing tea or cleaning hands during food preparation. Such small steps have been proven to reduce the number of preventable diseases and mortality. Pupils are also mobilizing their parents to immunize their siblings against polio and other preventable diseases (West Darfur has the highest level of neonatal tetanus in the world).

The contrast with the educational past could not be greater. Students

used to spend their days sitting cramped amid a sea of children on a dust or gravel floor, trying to memorize as much as possible without pen or paper – and with no food in their

stomachs until they had completed the long walk home.

Rehabilitated schools made parents keen to enrol their children and the



Tom Rhodes/2003

In Brazil, too, boys' problems with education are difficult to disentangle from their social class. Anderson's vivid picture of the call of the streets is backed up by a recent International Labour Organization study that looks at what it means to be in a Brazilian youth gang, a *comando*. In this kind of peer group a premium is put on actions and behaviours that are not likely to fit very easily into the average classroom, particularly in low-income areas. In addition, analysis of income data indicates that boys from poorer areas would have justification in thinking that schooling may not reap them sufficient financial rewards. People from low-income areas need to have 11 years of education before they reach the average earnings of people with just four years of schooling in metropolitan Rio de Janeiro as a whole.⁸⁵

In summary, the 'reverse gender gap' in Latin America and the Caribbean is by no means a simple phenomenon but rather one in which factors related to gender interact with class and race in telling ways, not to mention the individual differences, which of course mean that many boys perform well and happily in school while many girls find it extremely difficult. The challenge for educational researchers and policy makers in the region – and in the industrialized countries that are noting similar trends – is to find ways of countering boys' negative experience of education while not reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Gender sensitivity means what it says: being clear about the needs of both girls and boys, and creating school systems, classrooms and societies in which all children flourish – the ultimate objective of Education For All.

expansion of girls' education is having a domino effect within the community. "If one family sees its neighbours push for their daughters' education they will also struggle to ensure their daughters' attendance," says Maka Al-Dom Ahmed, Director of Girls' Education in West Darfur.

The partnership is also improving the quality of the classroom experience. In 2002, UNICEF trained 2,759 teachers (1,200 of them women) across Sudan in new methods of participation and interaction, and in making gender equality a fundamental part of the curriculum. Using theatre, sports and poetry workshops, teachers and community leaders managed to both educate students and reach the wider community with key messages. At the Al-Humaira Girls' School, for example, students prepared a performance including dance and poetry to promote peace and reconciliation within the community. This is particularly vital in this region, where clashes between nomads and farmers over scarce water resources and grazing lands are common, and where feuding

between 1999 and 2001 left 26 schools burned to the ground.

In these relatively isolated villages, pupils and adults are developing a broader perspective on the cultures that surround them, including a better understanding of their nomadic neighbours. Research indicates that such understanding in children leads to dialogue in adulthood and fosters a suitable environment for peace.

UM-Jumma herself is benefiting from another aspect of the Child-Friendly Community Initiative, which establishes adult education centres targeting those who missed out on primary schooling as young children. She is now attending the Al-Wehda Centre, learning the core subjects along with practical skills that will help her supplement her income.

These adult-education centres can be just as vital as primary schools in terms of their impact on the community. "A mother is a school in herself as she teaches the community around her," believes head teacher Fatihiyyah Abbas. Another passion-

ate advocate of girls' education is Eshama Ezzeldien Abdullah. Although illiterate herself, she has seen the difference education has made to her two daughters, who are now practising nurses. "There is such a difference within my own house now that my daughters have gone to school. They have shown us how to arrange our home, how to keep it clean, methods of protecting ourselves from fever and diarrhoea – simple ways such as covering milk to guard it from flies."

"There are signs of change," remarks Maka Al-Dom Ahmed. "Parents are starting to change their minds about the role of their daughters. In the past girls used to give birth at 12 years of age and by 18 would already have had three children."

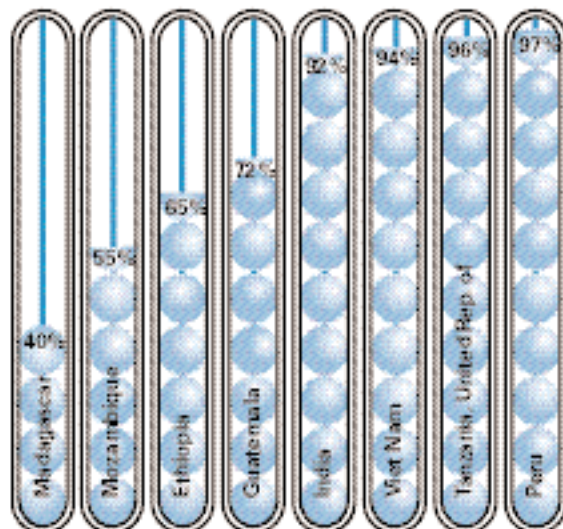
And now? Community leader Sheikh Mekki Bakhit Siam has a daughter learning veterinary science at Nyala University. When suitors ask him for her hand he says, "No way – you'll have to wait until she finishes her education."

Millennium Development Goals

Two goals – achieve universal primary education and promote gender equality and empower women – are critical to combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Prevention and treatment are the most powerful vehicles in this fight. Girls' education drives both.

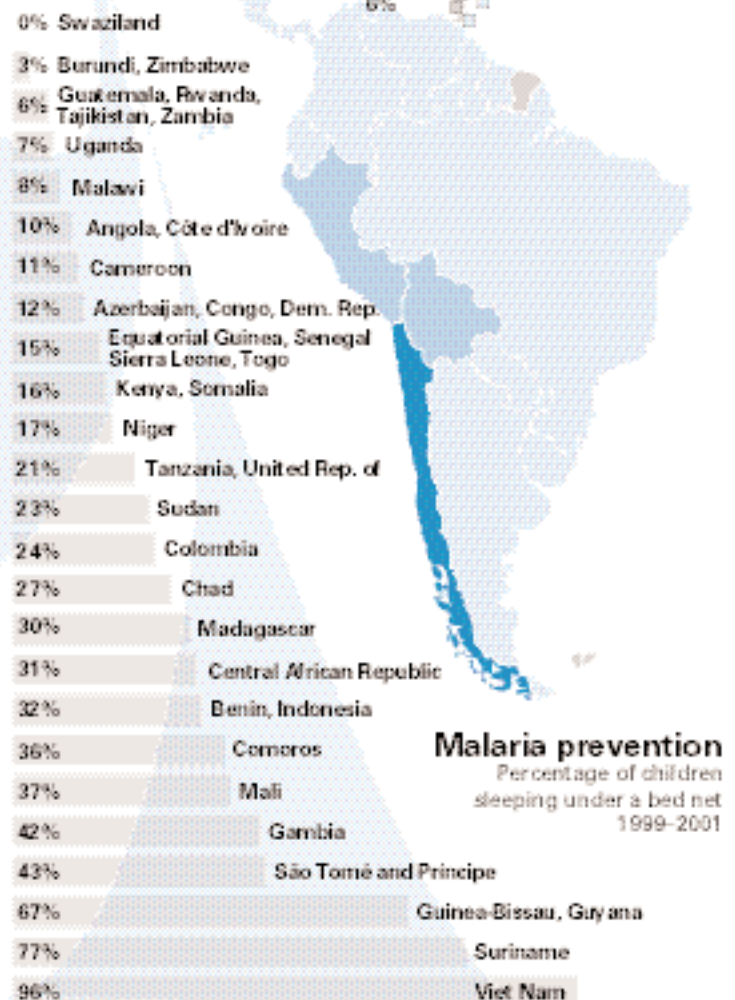
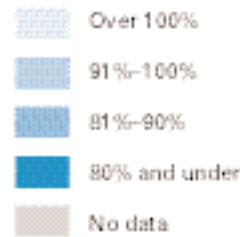
Primary school achievement

Percentage of children entering primary school who reach grade 5
Survey data 1995–2001
Selected countries



Secondary education for girls

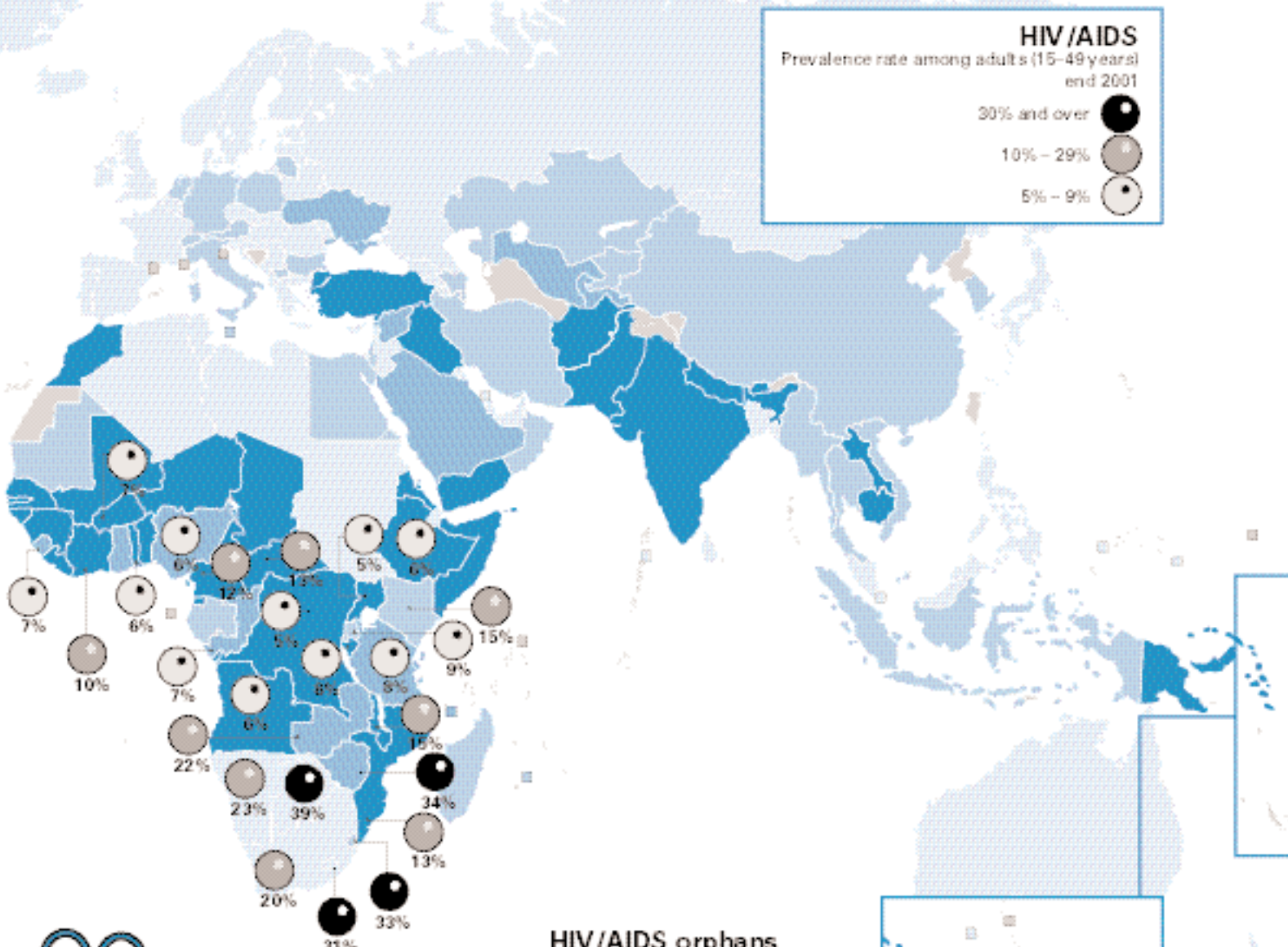
Females as percentage of males in secondary schools
1995–2000



Malaria prevention

Percentage of children sleeping under a bed net
1999–2001

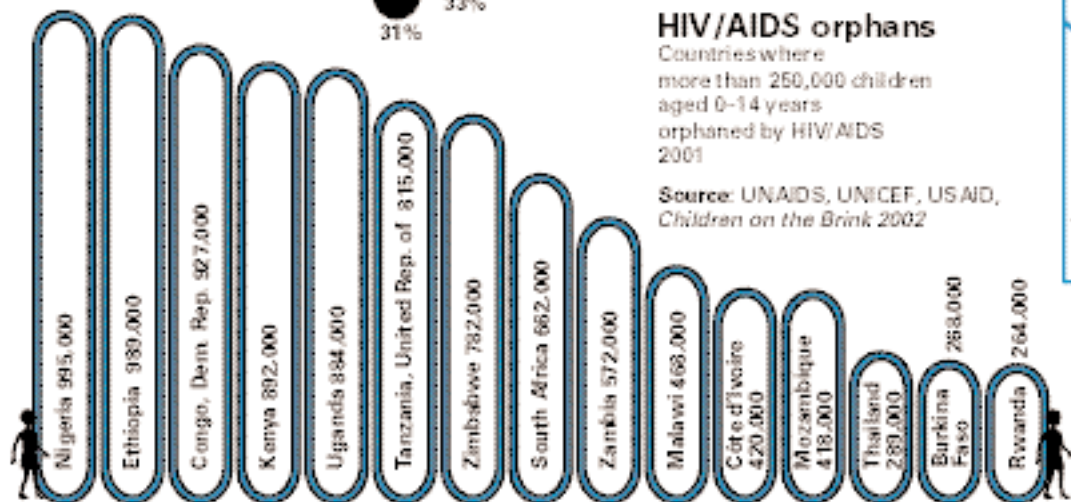
COMBAT HIV/AIDS, MALARIA AND OTHER DISEASES



HIV/AIDS orphans

Countries where more than 250,000 children aged 0-14 years orphaned by HIV/AIDS 2001

Source: UNAIDS, UNICEF, USAID, *Children on the Brink 2002*



This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontier. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.