



THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State of the World's Children 2004 focuses on girls' education as one of the most crucial issues facing the development community today. Girls are the focus because they are the ones who are usually left behind, because what benefits them will also benefit boys (and the reverse is not always true), because they are more vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse and other forms of exploitation when left uneducated. The report is a testimony to the prevailing gender disparities and to the toll girls' exclusion from school takes on them, their families, communities and countries. It is also a trove of information on strategies, programmes and initiatives developed by UNICEF and its partners to advance the cause of girls' education and thus improve the lives of all children. Finally, the report is a call to action.

Millennium Development Goals

At the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000, world leaders agreed to a set of measurable, time-bound targets known as the Millennium Development Goals to address crippling poverty and its devastating consequences. Each of the goals is critical to development, but two of them – universal education, and gender equality and empowering women – are considered central to all others. It is education that will provide the next generation with the tools to fight poverty and conquer disease, and it is parity in education that will ensure a future in which girls and boys are equally safe, healthy, protected and empowered. This is not a charitable enterprise, but a moral imperative.

The State of the World's Children 2004 argues that without the foundation of gender parity in education, achievements towards other goals cannot be sustained. In fact, gender parity in primary and secondary education is considered to be of such importance that its scheduled worldwide completion date is 2005, 10 years before that of all the other goals.

Yet despite thousands of successful projects in countries around the globe, gender parity in education remains a dream. *The State of the World's Children 2004* bears witness to the plight of 121 million children still out of school – 65 million of whom are girls.

The cost of girls' exclusion

The report presents the results of various studies on the costs and consequences of depriving girls of education. Major findings indicate that girls are particularly vulnerable to poverty and hunger; they are more at risk than boys from HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation and child trafficking; when a girl is without the knowledge and life skills that school can provide, there are immediate and long-term effects; she is exposed to many more risks than her educated counterparts and the consequences are bequeathed to the next generation.

Studies have also determined that education increases girls' self-confidence, social and negotiation skills and earning power and makes them less vulnerable to violence and ill health. Girls' education is inextricably linked to other facets of human

development. By making it a priority, we are promoting development in all other areas as well.

Why is it then that girls are systematically left out of school, women excluded from political processes, and countries left behind as development advances in some places and not in others? The answers, addressed throughout *The State of the World's Children 2004*, are interrelated and numerous. Prevalent gender discrimination and the failure to recognize education as a human right is just the beginning of the list.

Poverty is another factor. While both boys and girls from poor socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be educationally disenfranchised, poverty takes a greater toll on girls, who are in double jeopardy: because of their gender and because of their poverty.

The report summarizes the multiple returns of an investment in girls' education: enhanced economic development; education for the next generation; the effect of education that extends beyond the classroom (multiplier effect); reduction of child mortality; healthier families; fewer maternal deaths.

Girls' education and the development community

The report emphasizes that girls' education has yet to become a priority for development investments despite incontrovertible evidence that human development can foster economic progress and it is not the other way around. Numerous studies have confirmed that girls' education is the most effective means to advance human development. Some of the long-term benefits of girls' education that *The State of the World's Children 2004* calls particular attention to are:

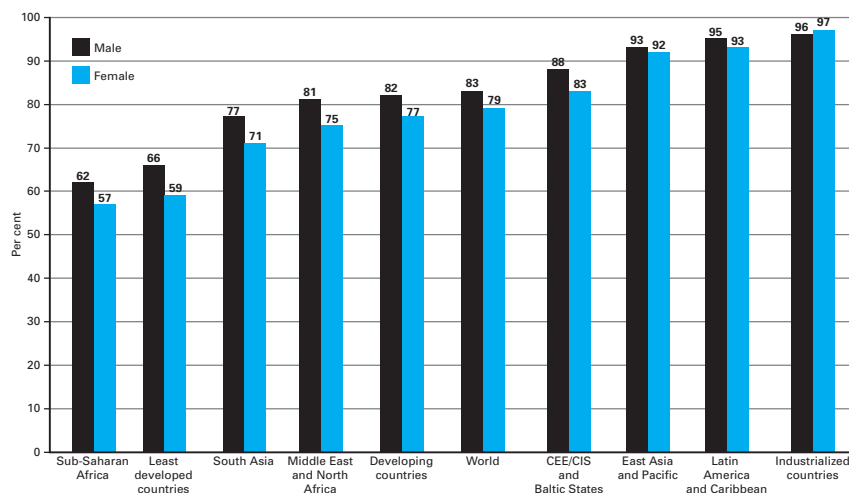
Pre-school programmes establish the rhythm of schooling for girls rather than the rhythm of household chores and income-generating tasks. Community-based care can familiarize girls with the idea of regular attendance and establish a good routine for their future life and the lives of their children.

Educated young people are more likely to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS.

A girl who is in school is less likely to be drawn into exploitative forms of work outside the home, and she is also drawn away from domestic duties that may be excessive. Girls who are literate and received life skills training are less vulnerable to extreme forms of intrafamily violence, sexual abuse and trafficking.

The State of the World's Children 2004 finds that although some regions are on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goal by 2005, girls in other parts of the world have been left far behind. The net primary school enrolment/attendance rates bear witness to this fact. (see figure)

NET PRIMARY ENROLMENT/ATTENDANCE RATES (1996-2002)



Source: UNICEF, 2003

Funding

The State of the World's Children 2004 finds that aside from a few exceptions, industrialized countries and international financial institutions have so far substantially failed to meet their commitments. Despite donor nations' 1990 promises for extra funding for education and their 1996 commitment to ensure universal primary education by 2015, total aid flows to developing countries actually declined during the 1990s, and bilateral funding for education plummeted even further.

Boys

In its vision of a healthy and egalitarian future for all children, *The State of the World's Children 2004* affirms the equal significance of boys' rights to an education. 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 State of the World's Children 2004 demonstrates that the reforms undertaken to make education safer, more relevant and more empowering for girls have also been shown to help boys. All children benefit from the expansion of integrated early childhood programmes, flexible schedules, adequate sanitation facilities, gender-conscious teaching, a child-friendly and violence-free school environment.

Call for action

The report concludes that girls' education is an ideal investment. It adds value to other social development sectors, eases the strain on the health-care system, reduces poverty and strengthens national economies. The cost is surmountable: Between now and 2015 donor nations might have to provide \$60 billion in external aid. The practical

barriers are also surmountable: To enrol and retain girls in school, integrated strategies are required. The evidence presented in *The State of the World's Children 2004* shows that the challenge of education for all is a challenge to development in all its sectors: education, finance, health, labour, justice and planning.

UNICEF issues an urgent call to leaders from every level of society and asks, among other things, for the inclusion of girls' education as an essential component of development efforts, for the cancellation of all school fees, for the integration of education policies into national plans on poverty reduction, and for the establishment of schools as centres of community development, particularly for children in conflict or emergency situations.

UNICEF also calls for an increase in international funding for education, directing 10 per cent of official aid to basic education. Industrialized nations must make good on their commitment to give at least 0.7 per cent of GNP in aid and at least 0.15 per cent to the least developed countries.

In the Annex, *The State of the World's Children 2004* presents strategies both in and out of the classroom for increasing girls' school enrolment and offers country examples of successful programmes – each in its own particular way promotes a model of a child-friendly, gender-sensitive school.