



THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2004

PRESS SUMMARY

It has been one year since UNICEF launched the '25 by 2005 Girls' Education Campaign' to accelerate efforts to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education. The campaign focuses on countries where girls' education faces significant challenges and where substantial assistance will be required to meet the Millennium Development Goal of gender parity by 2005.

In her report, *The State of the World's Children 2004*, Carol Bellamy, the organization's Executive Director, calls for a human rights-based, multisectoral approach to development that will ensure girls an education, meet the commitments of the international community to education for all children, maximize benefits for families and nations alike and help achieve many other of the world's major development goals.

What follows is a summary of the major issues presented in the report.

ISSUE 1: The most urgent of the Millennium Development Goals

The State of the World's Children 2004 presents girls' education as one of the most crucial issues facing the international development community. The report is a call to action on behalf of the 121 million children out of school around the world today, 65 million of whom are girls. It details the toll that their exclusion from school takes on the girls themselves, and also on their families, communities and countries.

World leaders have pledged to a set of Millennium Development Goals to be met by 2015: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, and create a global partnership for development.

Two of the Goals for 2015 are considered critical to achieving all others: universal education, and gen-

der equality and empowering women. And as a step towards universal education, gender parity in primary and secondary education is scheduled to be met by 2005, 10 years before the others. Not only an end in itself but also a key element of the broader development agenda, the 2005 goal is the first test of the world's commitment to break the stranglehold of poverty.

For these reasons, girls' education is presented as the most urgent goal of all.

(See Chapter 1, To jump-start development, pages 1-6)

ISSUE 2: Gender discrimination

In an attempt to explain why global commitments to gender parity in education have not been achieved, *The State of the World's Children 2004* argues that the theories, policies and practices of development have been marked by gender discrimination. The report finds that universal education has been considered a luxury rather than a human right,

economic development programmes have focused on economic performance rather than human welfare, and limited policies have looked only to the education sector when identifying solutions.

True, it is catastrophic when any child is deprived of an education, but the cost is even higher for a girl – and it will be paid not only by the girl herself but also by her family, her society and her country.

Girls are more at risk than boys from HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation and child trafficking. Girls are particularly vulnerable to poverty and hunger.

When girls are without the knowledge and life skills that school can provide, these risks both increase in the short term and are ultimately bequeathed to the next generation.

Conversely, education affords a girl:

- Learning and an expanded sense of her own potential
- Increased self-confidence, earning power, and social and negotiation skills
- Increased ability to protect herself from violence and ill health

(See Chapter 1, To jump-start development, pages 7-13)

ISSUE 3: A human rights, multisectoral approach to development

Girls' education has never been a priority for development investments. Historically, it has been assumed that economic expansion would in due course deliver social gains. But many years of dismal experience in developing countries have proved the inadequacy of this model, and no consistent evidence has emerged to show that economic growth alone can reduce poverty or inequality.

In fact, it is the opposite that appears to be true: Human development fosters economic progress. Countries that achieved the highest average annual growth in the 1990s were those that began in 1980 with strong human development indicators, according to a UNICEF study. There is now widespread understanding that a gender perspective on the economics of development is essential, and that poverty cannot be reduced in any sustainable manner without promoting women's empowerment.

Girls' education is so inextricably linked with the other facets of human development that to make it a priority is also to make progress on a range of other fronts:

- Health and status of women
- Early childhood care
- Nutrition, water and sanitation
- Reduction of child labour and other forms of exploitation
- Peaceful resolution of conflicts

(See Chapter 1, To jump-start development, page 11, and Chapter 2, Educated girls, a uniquely positive force for development, pages 17-27)

ISSUE 4: Multiple returns on investment in girls' education

- **Enhanced economic development.** As the primary enrollment rate for girls increases, so too does gross domestic product per capita. Countries that do not achieve gender parity in education increase the cost of their development efforts and pay for the failure with slower growth and reduced income.
- **Education for the next generation.** Children of educated mothers are much more likely to go to

school. The more schooling a woman has received, the more probable it is that her children will also benefit from education.

- **The multiplier effect.** Education affects areas far beyond the classroom, extending a positive influence into most aspects of a girl's life. Girls who go to school are better able to protect themselves from disease, including HIV/AIDS, are less likely to be trafficked or exploited as labourers, and are less vulnerable to violence.
- **Healthier families.** Educated mothers have healthier, better-nourished children, according to a review of extensive evidence from the developing world. Each extra year of maternal education reduces the rate of mortality for children under five by between 5 and 10 per cent.

- **Fewer maternal deaths.** Women who have been to school are better able to utilize health services, improve their own nutrition levels, and increase the spacing between births. For 1,000 women, every additional year of education is estimated to prevent 2 maternal deaths.

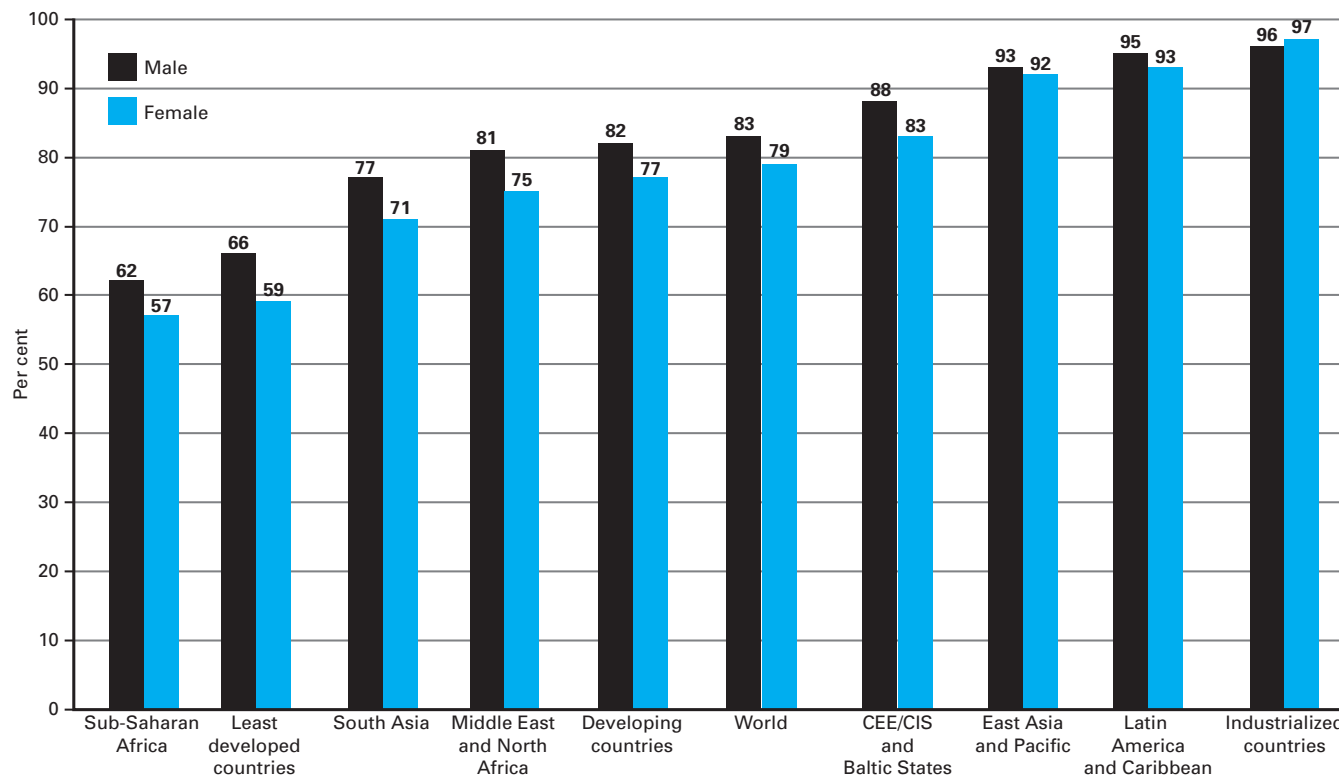
(See Chapter 2, Educated girls, a uniquely positive force for development, pages 17-27)

ISSUE 5: The global gender gap

Some regions of the world are on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of gender parity in education by 2005, but in at least three, it simply won't happen if nothing more is done. *(see figure)*

(See Chapter 3, Girls left out, countries left behind, pages 31-34)

NET PRIMARY ENROLLMENT/ATTENDANCE RATES (1996-2002)



Source: UNICEF, 2003.

ISSUE 6: Poverty

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.

And when girls are out of school, they are often 'invisible'. Their numbers are either underreported or not reported at all. Even relatively high attendance and enrollment rates can mask the number of girls who drop out of school, especially in rural areas. Numbers that are increasing.

In places where girls' enrollment and completion rates in primary school are higher than those of boys, girls still may not advance to secondary schools, or beyond, women may not be found in leadership roles, and qualified women still earn less than men. Countries that have achieved gender parity in education face a new challenge: finding ways to expand social expectations for their educated girls.

(See Chapter 2, Educated girls, a uniquely positive force for development, pages 26-27 and Chapter 3, Girls left out, countries left behind, pages 34-37)

ISSUE 7: Funding shortfall

Industrialized countries and international financial institutions, with only very few exceptions, have failed to make the investment in education that will enable girls to attend and complete school. Total aid flows to developing countries actually declined during the 1990s, and bilateral funding for education has plummeted even further. A new consensus on investing in education emerged at the 2002 International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico, where governments pledged to increase overall assistance and aid to basic education in particular. The current global preoccupation with security may result in the abandonment of some aid pledges. As it stands, the low

level of international assistance represents part of the problem rather than the solution it must become if all children are to enjoy their right to an education.

(See Chapter 4, The multiplier effect of education girls, pages 37-41)

ISSUE 8: Multisectoral benefits

A traditional focus on single-sector programmes has obscured the benefits of girls' education to all sectors of development. Today, there is new understanding as to why educating girls is the most urgent task facing the global development community.

- **The best start for children** – Ensuring that a woman is empowered, healthy and well educated – a good unto itself – can have a dramatic effect on the welfare of her children: If she is ill, hungry or oppressed she is unlikely to nurture her children adequately.
- **Preparation for later schooling** – Pre-school programmes are particularly beneficial for girls: They establish the rhythm of schooling in communities where girls are more often engaged in household chores and income-generating tasks. Community-based care can familiarize girls with the idea of regular attendance; even spending a few hours each day with a grandparent can help book a place for schooling in a young girl's life.
- **Fighting HIV/AIDS** – Over 5 million people are newly infected with HIV/AIDS each year. In the hardest-hit countries, painstakingly accrued gains in human development have been rapidly eliminated; in sub-Saharan Africa, there are an estimated 11 million children orphaned by AIDS. These are often the first children to be forced to leave school – and girls, who care disproportionately for sick relatives, are once more at the highest risk.

In the absence of a vaccine, education is society's best defense against the disease. Better-educated people have lower rates of infection. Educated young people are more likely to protect themselves, and those who are in school spend less time in risky situations.

- **Creating a protective environment** – After the family, education is the next perimeter of a protective environment for children. 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, particularly those who have received life skills training, are less vulnerable to extreme forms of intrafamily violence, sexual abuse and trafficking.
- **Helping girls in emergencies** – Girls are especially vulnerable in situations of conflict or natural disaster, and they must be especially protected against physical, sexual and psychological abuse. In partnership with local initiatives, UNICEF has pioneered the development of child-friendly, gender-sensitive spaces in emergencies that make it possible for children to continue their school cycles, mothers to spend time with their infants and receive counselling, women to continue their own education, and young people to be trained as service providers for children.
- **The benefits to communities** – Targeted initiatives to increase girls' enrollment also benefit families and social communities. School feeding programmes that are put in place to help girls stay in school, for example, can help trigger better nutrition practices at home. Similarly, the provision of adequate sanitation facilities can transform the quality of life in a local community.

(See Chapter 4, The multiplier effect of educating girls, pages 45-55)

ISSUE 9: The 'reverse gender gap'

Although the global gender gap clearly puts girls at an educational disadvantage, it is important to recognize that in some regions – including much of the industrialized world – it is boys' disaffection with school that is cause for concern. In a minority of countries, there are fewer boys than girls enrolled in school: a 'reverse gender gap'.

In industrialized nations, girls tend to show better results than boys in most academic subjects. The problem, like that of girls' underachievement in the developing world, is inseparable from wider questions about gender and power. Girls' socialization in the home may make them more amenable to the classroom environment. And while girls in sub-Saharan Africa benefit from the presence of women teachers, boys in industrialized countries and Latin America and the Caribbean – where the vast majority of teachers are women – may suffer from the absence of positive male role models.

The reforms enacted to make education safer, more relevant and more empowering for girls will also help boys. All children, for instance, benefit from the expansion of integrated early childhood programmes, flexible schedules, adequate sanitation facilities, gender-conscious teaching and a violence-free school environment. Research shows that boys, especially those from vulnerable or marginalized groups, consistently benefit from child-friendly schools.

(See Chapter 5, What about boys? pages 59-67)

ISSUE 10: Investing in girls' education

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 evidence presented in *The State of the World's Children 2004* demonstrates that the challenge of education for all is a challenge to development in all its sectors:

- To education – certainly; but also
- To finance, which must allocate funds and make schools affordable;
- To health, which must provide adequate services, water and sanitation;
- To labour, which must establish protection for working children;
- To justice, which must make schools safe;
- To planning, which must enable local communities and parents to oversee the services they need for their children to survive and thrive.

UNICEF calls on leaders from every level of society to:

1. Include girls' education as an essential component of development efforts, protecting core human rights principles and the specific rights of girls.
2. Create a national ethos for girls' education by implementing a widespread civic education campaign and holding governments accountable for progress.
3. Allow no school fees of any kind. All primary schools must be free and universal.
4. Think both outside and inside the 'education box', integrating education policies into national plans for poverty reduction and scaling up programmes that work.
5. Establish schools as centres of community development, particularly for children in conflict and emergency situations.
6. Integrate strategies related to investments, policies, and institutions with those related to service delivery and conceptual frameworks.
7. Increase international funding for education, directing 10 per cent of official aid to basic education. Industrialized nations must give at least 0.7 per cent of GNP in aid and at least 0.15 per cent to the least developed countries.

(See Chapter 6, The right thing to do, pages 71-79)