

Girls' Education: The World's Best Hope

August 2003

UNICEF video B-Roll
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Girls' Education: An Introduction

"There can be no significant or sustainable transformations in societies – and no significant or lasting reduction in global poverty – until girls receive the quality basic education they need and that is their fundamental right."

Carol Bellamy, UNICEF Executive Director

UNICEF believes education is a basic right of every child, and Girls' Education is an important target of UNICEF's ongoing efforts in 158 countries worldwide. Of an estimated 700 million primary school-age children in the world today, some 125 million are not in school; the majority of them girls. At any moment, some 66 million girls are being denied their right to education; of the planet's 875 million illiterate adults, two-thirds are women.

Girls and boys both have hurdles to overcome in attaining a quality education; the hurdles are invariably higher and more frequent for girls, simply because they are not boys. Eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education is one of UNICEF's key goals for the year 2005.

To accomplish this, UNICEF will accelerate its efforts in 25 countries where the situation is most critical to maximize the number of girls in school by the year 2005: the "25 by 2005 Initiative". In these selected countries, including Nepal and Nigeria, UNICEF will concentrate resources, intensify intervention and work closely with national governments and partners to reach out-of-school girls.

Worldwide, the single most important factor that prevents girls from attending and achieving in school is gender discrimination, for a variety of reasons: family poverty, cultural resistance, religious tradition, early marriage and pregnancy, issues of safety and security, even public opinion.

Few actions have as profound an impact on children as education, the foundation of human development.

Education saves the lives of girls and women. It allows girls and women greater control of their lives and provides them with the skills to contribute to their societies. It enables them to make decisions for themselves and to influence their families.

An educated mother is more likely to protect her child from avoidable illness and disease with routine health check-ups, growth monitoring and a nutritious diet. She knows that her child can be safe from such preventable diseases as polio, measles and diarrhoea through immunization.

Studies show that when children are well nurtured and cared for early on, they are more likely to grow robustly, to suffer less from disease and have fewer illnesses, and to fully develop thinking, language, emotional and social skills. When they enter school, they are more likely to perform well and have greater self-esteem.

Children of educated mothers will be more likely to survive infancy, be better nourished, more productive at home and better paid at the workplace. They will be less likely to fall victim to exploitation and sex trafficking. Later, they will be able to assume a more active role in social economic and political decision-making throughout life.

In 2002, half of all adults living with HIV/AIDS globally were female. Girls' education may be the single most effective weapon in slowing the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In countries with severe epidemics, young people with higher levels of education are more likely to use condoms and less likely to engage in casual sex than their less educated peers.

Girls' education is, simply put, the most effective means we have to combat some of the most profound challenges to human development, such as infant mortality, HIV/AIDS, child labour, sexual exploitation and child trafficking in children.

It is clear that investing in girls' education is tantamount to investing in life.

1. Girls' Education in Nigeria

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with some 117 million citizens and 250 ethnic groups. Among adults, 41% of females and 57% of males are literate. (FME, 2002)

Education is one of our most important weapons against the spread of HIV/AIDS. In sub-Saharan Africa, 55% of those infected with HIV/AIDS are women, and girls between 15 and 24 years old are five times as likely to become infected as boys. Some 1 million Nigerian children have lost at least one parent; more than 1 million have lost a teacher to the disease.

One of UNICEF's Nigerian collaborations is in the town of Kuje, 50 kilometres from the capital city of Abuja. The Kuje Area Council has 77 primary schools and 7 Secondary Schools. Of these, only the Kuje Science Primary School is currently child/girl friendly, as defined by UNICEF guidelines.

The population of Kuje is about 44,000; local tribes include the Gades, Gwaris, and Hausa/Fulanis. Farming is the traditional occupation of the local population.

The school was in a state of advanced degradation when UNICEF, in partnership with the British Airways Change for Good campaign, the FCT Primary Education Board, the Kuje Area Council and the school's parent teacher association moved in to salvage the situation in 2001.

The school, which has a pupil population of about 4,000, was rehabilitated, resupplied and transformed to a child/girl friendly school through this partnership.

The school environment has become more physically, socially and psychologically motivating for learning. A once over-crowded school with dilapidated, unsafe classrooms has been transformed into a safe haven; a warm and stimulating place for children to learn, play and stay on to complete a good quality education.

This development has brought a new lease of life to education in Kuje as many parents from nearby satellite towns have relocated there to take advantage of the friendly learning environment. Attendance has increased tremendously and drop-out rate in the Kuje Science Primary School has virtually disappeared.

Video Script

Despite its proximity to the capital, Kuje retains its rural character. Not everyone can afford or is allowed to attend school; many children must work to earn money for their families or help out around the home.

Rakiya Zakari, 11, has 6 siblings, all girls apart from the youngest. Both her parents are very proactive in making sure their offspring are educated; their oldest daughter attends university in Abuja. They are determined that the children complete their homework and that their children do not have to resort to hawking on the street to earn money for the family's upkeep. Each morning the Zakari family gathers in the home for breakfast before household chores and the school day gets under way.

Zakari Haruna is an Intelligence Officer with the State Security Service in Abuja. He is determined to see all of his daughters educated. He is an active participant in the opportunity of learning.

Rakiya's mother, Habiba Zakari, is a housewife who did not complete her education. She is unable to read and write proficiently.

Girls often have many more chores than boys; there is often the perception that a girl is more useful helping out at home in the short term than becoming educated in the long term. Rakiya's parents, however, are committed to education, and after sweeping the family's dining area and taking care of the washing up, she and her schoolmates head to class.

Rakiya is fortunate that she can attend Kuje Science Primary School; nationally only 54% of Nigerian girls attend primary school at all, and even fewer in rural areas.

The school day begins with an outdoor assembly for all the children. Muslim and Christian pupils alike complete prayers, side by side; Rakiya’s family is Muslim. They do stretching exercises and sing the national anthem before heading off to the classroom.

Girls’ participation in basic education in the rural parts of the Kuje Area Council is relatively low, as is typical in many communities in northern parts of the country. Major reasons for this are poverty, negative religious and/or cultural beliefs and early marriage.

Josephine Anakwue is Rakiya’s Quantitative Reasoning teacher. As more and more girls attend school, the importance of having female role models such as teachers, doctors and lawyers cannot be overestimated.

Rakiya loves maths and she is a very proactive student. Pupils applaud each other with rhythmic clapping when a problem is solved correctly.

Interview with Rakiya.

Interview with Josephine Anakwue.

The Kuje Area Education Authority has a firm advocate in equal education for girls and boys in Executive Secretary Adamu Jatau Noma.

UNICEF believes sport, including football, is more than just a game: it's a way to promote a peaceful approach to conflict resolution, a tool for keeping children away from the lures of drugs, sex, and violence; a way to help ensure that young people grow up healthy, fit and full of self-esteem, both in the classroom and out. Rakiya also enjoys volleyball and sprinting.

PAL TIME CODE	GIRLS’ EDUCATION SHOTLIST: KUJE, NIGERIA MAY 2003
01:00:00	Local adults and children carry on daily activities. Girls and boys not enrolled in school sell their wares or simply mill about.
010040	Rakiya’s house in Kuje. Siblings and relatives gather outside.
0050	The Zakari family begins the day with breakfast together.
0140	Father Zakari Haruna: “Since they are not educated, my sisters, and my senior sisters are not educated and even my wife also didn’t go to school. After seeing the advantages of education I am determined, and she is, too, determined, that our children should be well educated.”
0200	Mother Habiba Zakari (in Igala, the regional language): “I did not go to school, so I want all my children to go to school. I want life to be better for my children when they grow up.”
0219	Rakiya completes household chores before school; sweeping the breakfast area and washing up.
0254	Pupils walk to their school in their uniforms, in the colours of the Nigerian flag.
0335	Pupils gather for morning assembly. Prayers, exercises, singing, clapping.
0455	Rakiya and fellow pupils in the classroom, various angles and shot lengths. Rakiya at blackboard.
0620	Rakiya talks about her life, hopes and fears for the future: “My family is a very happy and peaceful family, and I’m proud of myself to be educated. And all my father’s children are educated.”
0635	“I do go to school every day except weekends.”

0643	“First, by the grace of God, if I finish my primary school, and I go to my secondary school, and I finish my university, then I’d like to become a medical doctor in the future.”
0654	“My fear is that my father won’t have money to take me to school so I don’t finish my education.”
0702	Rakiya’s Quantitative Reasoning teacher Josephine Anakwue: “Our parents don’t normally...they feel that it is not important for we women to go to school, because the prefer men going to school. They say that it is not important training us to go to school. Then, as time goes on, they started to see the importance of education.”
0730	Adamu Jatau Noma, Executive Secretary, Local Education Authority, Kuje Area Council, Abuja: “Nigeria is fast developing. People have come to understand if you educate a female child, that there’s an adage here: if you educate a female child, you are educating an entire nation. Because children will grow up to become mothers, and when they become mothers, if they are properly educated, they’ll be able to take care of the society”
0800	Rakiya and fellow female pupils play football on the school pitch.

2. Girls’ Education in Nepal

With an annual gross national product of just \$250 per capita--and 38 per cent of the population of 23.2 million living below the poverty line--Nepal is one of the world’s least developed and poorest countries. The overall literacy rate nationally for adult females remains unacceptably low: only 35%, compared with 62% for men. In Nepal, 87% of boys and 75% of girls attend primary school. In 2001, some 13,000 Nepalis under 15 years old were AIDS orphans.

Nepali children from disadvantaged families who had the opportunity to attend non-formal preschool were 20 per cent more likely to attend school than those who did not. But for girls, the effect was multiplied: they were 36 per cent more likely to enter school. But a 19% gender gap in primary education between boys and girls remains.

Innovative UNICEF experiences with teacher training, decentralized educational planning and pre-schools have been incorporated as national plans.

Video Script

The Kalika Village Development Committee is located in the Pokhara Valley in the Kaski District in Western Nepal, surrounded by the Annapurna mountain range.

The area is still largely rural, and Kamala Nepali’s family depends on subsistence farming on their rocky plot of land to survive. As farming is particularly labour intensive, many girls are kept at home and out of school to help. Feeding the family’s goats is one of Kamala’s daily chores before she can set off for class.

Kamala’s family begins each day with breakfast outside on the veranda. Before leaving for school, more chores: washing up.

Owing to tradition, attending school was not an option for Kamala’s mother, Maiya Devi Nepali. Parents simply did not believe it was of value to educate their daughters.

Red school bows firmly in place, Kamala and her older brother set off for school. It’s just a 15 minute walk up a mountainside away, but at an altitude of 1200m, the going quickly grows tough.

Both girls and boys attend Kamala’s school, where her favourite subject is Nepalese. Her Nepalese teacher, Dalda Devi Bhujel has been teaching in her school for almost 10 years and is an excellent role model for her students, especially the girls. She’s a dedicated advocate of equal educational opportunities for girls and boys.

UNICEF's experience shows that the power of sport reaches children and young people from all walks of life, and physical education is an integral part of the school day at Kamala's school. Here, Kamala and her co-pupils play a type of high-altitude tag unique to these mountains.

Homework takes up a good portion of the afternoon on the veranda. Kamala's brother Dambar is on hand to help her with anything she doesn't understand fully.

Hom Bahadur is Kamala's father. Farming earns the family the equivalent of US\$4 per day. He is a firm believer in the merits of education and supporting all his 4 daughters and 2 sons through school. He's proud that all of his children who are old enough have gone to school to better his family's situation.

More chores are on tap for the whole family before the evening meal. Cows must be fed, and greens gathered for the goats, before the sun slips behind the towering mountains.

PAL TIME CODE	GIRLS' EDUCATION SHOTLIST: KASKI DISTRICT, NEPAL APRIL 2003
01:08:50	Kamala does early morning chores, beginning with providing forage for the family goats.
010943	The Nepali family gathers on the veranda for breakfast. Kamala does the washing up before heading up the mountain to school.
1050	Mother, Maiya Devi Nepali: "Earlier people used to believe that educating girls wasn't of much use and only boys should be educated. But now we have both girls and boys being sent to school together as equals as we are doing with our children now".
1118	Kamala gets ready for school. Her sister helps her put the regulation red bows in her hair.
1134	Kamala and her brother head through the village up the hill to school. Other girls from other local villages arrive as well.
1207	Kamala Nepali: "I walk to school. It takes me 15 minutes to reach the school. I go with my elder brother, sisters and younger brother."
1219	"After completing my studies, I want to become a doctor. I want to give free help to the sick and needy people and also help other underprivileged children like myself".
1233	"I would like to tell all the children of the world that their parents should fulfil their wishes and educate them and help them lead a successful life from the bright sunlight of education."
1253	Various shots and angles of Kamala and her classmates, both male and female. Kamala is called to the front to demonstrate a concept.
1419	Dalda Devi Bhujel, Kamala's Nepalese teacher: "Quality education is of utmost importance because then, every Nepali will be able to stand on their own feet and be able to make their own decisions in life. This is why I feel quality education is very important."
1433	Kamala and her classmates play a Himalayan tag-type game, kapadi, called 'gudgude' in the local dialect.
1505	Kamala and brother do homework on the veranda.
1545	Kamala's brother, Dambar: "I help my sisters by teaching them what they do not understand at school."
1605	Father feeds cows
1625	Father, Hom Bahadur: "Kamala has improved a lot after studying and I feel she will do better in the future."
1633	Kamala gathers forage for the goats. The sun sets over the Annapurnas.

3. If She's not in School, where is She?

Across Africa, young girls are frequently put to use fetching water from a local well or tap, which could be kilometres away. On the long trek home, they are sometimes at risk of sexual assault.

In India, school-age children are often put to work manufacturing 'beedies', inexpensive cigarette substitutes. A 12 hour work day might bring in as little as 50 cents.

In the Philippines, young girls from the provinces travel by boat to the big cities in search of a better life. The Coast Guard maintains a presence on the dock to protect young provincial girls from predatory sex traders looking to exploit them.

Many parts of the world, children feel they have no other option than to resort to prostitution to earn money, as this girl in Nicaragua. The chances of pregnancy or acquiring HIV/AIDS are very high indeed.

Nearly 14 million children, like these young Rwandans, have been orphaned by AIDS. These girls fend for themselves in an abandoned building. In the absence of a vaccine protecting people against HIV/AIDS, education is the best defence against the disease.

Clearly, being in school helps children in general, and girls in particular, avoid some of the many hazards in the modern world, as here in Malawi. As part of a life skills class on preventing HIV/AIDS, a young girl and boy enact a money-for-sex scenario. The importance of bringing quality education to every child cannot be overemphasized.

4. Interview with Carol Bellamy, UNICEF Executive Director, New York City

PAL TIME CODE	INTERVIEW SELECTS: AUGUST 2003
01:19:53	It is urgent to get girls into school because first, they have a right to education. Secondly, it is their passport out of poverty. But third, the world, through the governments of the world, has made a commitment to achieve gender parity in all development activities by the year 2005. That means the urgency of ensuring that both boys and girls go to school is now.
20:22	We are asking governments, parents, families, communities to understand that they will be stronger if their girls receive an education. Those children are less likely to die before the age of 5 if their mothers have gotten an education. That women are less likely to be victims of abuse if, as young girls, they've gotten an education. So we're asking everybody to commit themselves to this effort.
2049	Education for girls is probably the best investment for society, but for that girl, it means she'll grow to be a healthy adult, or more likely to grow up to be a healthy adult, she's more likely to have healthy children, her children are less likely to be a victim of disease, she's more likely to contribute to her family and her community, and her family's more likely to be economically secure.
2110	Without human development, there won't be economic development. One of the best ways to move human development forward is to educate girls.
2122	UNICEF is working closely with governments, civil society, the private sector, with families, and with girls themselves to make sure that girls go to school. UNICEF is committed that no children, boys or girls, are left out of education.

5. Angélique Kidjo: PSA on Girls' Education; French and English.

UNICEF is bringing in as much help as it can to support its initiatives to get all girls and boys into school. This includes West African singer and songwriter Angélique Kidjo, one of the most electrifying performers in the pop world today, and a huge star across Africa. She made this special public service announcement, aimed at all sectors of African society, in an attempt to raise awareness and action in Africa, which has some of the highest levels of girls out of school. Angélique Kidjo has a deep commitment to children and young people, and to girls' education in particular. UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy appointed Kidjo as a Goodwill Ambassador on 25 July 2002. "Ms. Kidjo's global popularity and personal commitment to children will make a big difference for UNICEF and for children everywhere," Bellamy said.

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