



QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL
FROM A GIRL'S POINT OF VIEW

QUALITY AND ACCESS IN EDUCATION

Basic education is the right of every girl and boy. UNICEF is especially concerned about including children who are excluded from learning: those who are out of school, and those who are excluded while in school.

Providing all children with access to schooling was the primary focus of the early drive towards Education For All (EFA) following the World Conference on Education For All in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. Progress has been made towards this goal. Primary-school enrolments have increased in all regions. However, of an estimated

700 million primary-school-aged children, roughly 120 million are still out of school today and the majority of these are girls.

Ensuring access alone is not enough. The quality of education is also a significant issue, closely linked to the state of girls' education. At the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, 164 countries agreed to work for elimination of the gender gap in enrolment (gender parity) by the year 2005, and gender equality by 2015.

We are nowhere near these goals.



WE HAVE LEARNED MANY THINGS ABOUT EDUCATION SINCE 1990. FOUR LESSONS STAND OUT:

1. Access to education of poor quality is tantamount to no access at all.
2. The quality of education children receive is critical to genuine learning and human development.
3. Quality is influenced by what goes on in the classroom – and beyond.
4. Education For All cannot be achieved while gender discrimination, the largest obstacle to educational achievement, persists.



"I live with my uncle and his wife. I sell plantain chips to supplement the family income. I had a little basic education but stopped for lack of support. My uncle's children, however, attend school. I sometimes wish I could, too, but my uncle says he cannot pay my school fees. He has, however, promised to help me learn to sew when I am about 17 years old.... Though I feel sad about not having the opportunity to go to school, I guess I may be better off than somebody else; at least I am being offered the opportunity to learn how to sew, but how I wish I could go to school. My advice to parents is: 'Please send your children to school.'"

Abena, 13, Ghana

"I had to do so much work at home.... I wanted to go to school, I was not afraid.... I didn't go to school because I had to work. Here [at school], I am learning so much. I am learning to think well of myself. When I think of home, all I think of is housework... I want to be a teacher so I can make others feel like me now, teach them what I've learned, that school is good for girls, just like it is for boys.

"Girls are treated differently from boys because boys make money, and girls do not, because we are not educated.... Had my mother gone to school, she would think differently, she could earn money too."

Sangeeta, 16, India

"Here, most children can't go to school because they have to work in the fields to help feed their families.

"My class takes place early, before the children start work. During planting, many can't come – I have to repeat the class later. There are twenty of us in a room a man in our village kindly lets us use. The room is dark, though. I only wish we had more daylight.

"Here, we know that to study is very important for the future. In my village we can read and write now. We now have a chance to get a better job and a better income."

Shuva, 16, teacher's aide in Nepal

WHAT IS QUALITY EDUCATION?

Quality education is defined by five key dimensions, in which girls often fare poorly: **what learners bring, environments, content, processes** and **outcomes**. This definition of quality education starts with a focus on an adequate number of schools, books, pencils and trained teachers, and the number of children who finish school. It moves beyond this to consider what goes on inside *and* outside of school. It encompasses education for human security, for community development and for national progress. It is an enormous challenge. It is also an immense opportunity.

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR GIRLS

Girls and boys have the same right to a quality education. But the 'gender gap' quickly demonstrates that more girls than boys are kept out of school. In 1990, 20 per cent of the world's primary-school-aged children were out of school, two thirds of them girls. By 2000, the number of children out of school had been brought down to about 120 million worldwide; most of these (more than 70 million) were girls. There are now more children than ever in the world's primary schools – but the majority of those who are not are still girls.

Quality is particularly important in the challenge of closing the gender gap in basic education. Girls in particular face discrimination and challenging circumstances that keep them out of school and keep them from learning effectively. There is little point in providing the opportunity for a child to enrol in school if the quality of the education means that she will not attend, let alone become literate, learn math and acquire skills for life.

Parents with limited resources say that the quality of education matters in their decisions of whether to put or keep their daughters in school at all. If girls are not learning at school, if what they learn is not useful or if the school environment is not safe for them, parents withdraw them from school.

If quality is so important to getting girls into school and keeping them there, then improving quality must be high on our agenda.

In this booklet we will explore the following questions:

- What experiences do girl **learners** bring to school (and what particular challenges do they face)?
- What healthy, safe, protective and stimulating **learning environments** enable girls to achieve?
- How does the **content** of curriculum and learning materials include or exclude girls?
- What **processes** of teaching and learning and support for learning achievement from the communities, parents, supervisors and teachers support or undermine girls' learning achievements?
- What **outcomes** of basic education do we expect for girls (how can we document how well girls are learning, and what pathways does education open up for further learning and fulfilment of their potential)?



"I am from a poor family in India. My father and mother work for the living, but it is not sufficient. I go to school and do my homework if I get time. I have to do the household chores, as my mother works.... I don't understand some subjects; for that I cannot take special coaching, because I cannot afford [it]."

Anamika, 13, India

"I had never been to school before because my father didn't think girls should be educated. Even my mother thought the same; she never went to school either. My brothers went to school because they would become 'working hands'. My father said I would just get married."

Rinku, 15, India

"Girls are so oppressed by housework, and it is not just the parents.... When you marry, then it is your husband, his family."

Sangeeta, 16, India

"The sexually abused girls need to be given more encouragement and hope for the future. They should not be humiliated by society, especially at school, because one develops psychological [problems] which may lead to one losing hope in the future, hence failure to realize one's goals, especially in education."

Namanya, Uganda

"I quit school at 13 years because of economical problems. At 15, I tried to come back, but I wasn't accepted anymore."

Eilyn, 15, Costa Rica

WHAT LEARNERS BRING

Children bring many things with them when they come to school: their language, culture and a range of early experiences.

Children and young people who are physically and psychosocially healthy, well nourished, ready to participate and learn, and supported to learn by families and communities are more likely to benefit from a quality education.

Positive early childhood experiences are important to children's success in school, and families and communities play a key role in providing/ensuring these. But the experiences any child brings may be negative or even harmful – for instance, they may include social trauma, personal abuse or HIV/AIDS. Teachers need to be ready to receive and work with learners and whatever they bring to school.

Healthy development, especially during the first three years of life, provides the basis for a successful formal school experience. Prevention of infection, disease and injury are critical, and adequate nutrition is essential for normal brain development in the child's early years. Early detection and intervention for disabilities give children the best chances for healthy development.

Once in school, in order to achieve academically, children must attend school consistently. Once again, families and communities play a key role in ensuring children's regular attendance – necessary for learning to take place.

GIRLS AS LEARNERS

Learning begins at birth, but already not everything is equal. Children born into affluent homes are more likely than those born into poverty to receive care and benefits that will enhance early development and learning. Girls are more likely to be discriminated against from the beginning. They may receive less care, both in terms of nurturing and in terms of food. Their schooling is often sacrificed for their labour at home and beyond: girls are a large proportion of 'invisible' child workers. Often, parents simply do not think it is important to send girls to school.

Adults frequently expect less of girls, and girls learn to expect less of themselves. When girls are raised not to value themselves, and without a sense of the human rights to which they are entitled, they are less ready to participate in school and learn.



“It is sad to see that instead of schools being places for reading and enjoying, girls are abused by working for teachers – they collect water, firewood, [and] wash and clean teacher’s houses. This should be stopped immediately, and girls given opportunity to read and excel just like boys.”

Sia, 13, United Republic of Tanzania

“Before this pump was set up in the school yard, we used to have to walk far to get water. Now it is much better. The water itself is better. The old water was bad for our teeth and bones...we are very grateful.”

Meskerem, 14, Ethiopia

“Some male teachers call the girls to take their books to their homes. The girl accepts to take the books and the teacher follows her. When he sees the girl entering into the house, he also follows the girl and enters into the house and he starts to touch the girl’s breasts and forces her to have sex. I’m advising the male teachers who do that to stop it.”

Abwak, 14, Uganda

“For six years, my school has been a railroad car. It is difficult to learn. There is not glass in the windows. During the summer it is impossible to stay cool and during the winter it’s impossible to stay warm.... I don’t have any gloves, so it’s terrible to write. After one or two lessons in the cold, the teachers usually let us leave.”

Isa, 17, Azerbaijan

QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The learning **environment** is a critical dimension of educational quality. It must be gender-sensitive, healthy and safe for children, protective of them and successful in helping them learn. Families and communities should play a central role in ensuring such environments.

A quality learning environment includes adequate facilities – a school building, if possible, where girls and boys have the same access to physical exercise, adequate hygiene and sanitation facilities, clean water and health services. It includes reasonable class sizes, so that teachers can teach all children and so that all children can learn; and school policies that promote physical and mental health. It is safe and secure for all children.

A quality learning environment is a place where children are free to learn, where they have learning resources and where children are excited about and proud of learning because of positive reinforcement from the teacher.

A quality learning environment gives children time to think and space to create. The classroom and the school are safe, peaceful and orderly places where all children can spend the maximum amount of time on learning.

QUALITY FOR GIRLS

While no single environmental factor will exclude or include all girls, safety and security in the learning environment are essential. Lack of safety and security may be very obvious, in the form of physical danger such as beatings or rape. More insidious are the invisible forms of harassment and violence. These vary from making girls (but not boys) do school maintenance tasks or personal chores for teachers at the expense of learning; to denying girls physical exercise (no girls' sports or playground time); to sexual harassment.

Sanitation is also important. There is evidence that having separate, safe girls' latrines contributes to girls' attendance in school.



"I want to learn to speak English.... I like to listen to stories about our history, too, and I like skipping rope with my friends and playing hopscotch."

Zakia, 10, Afghanistan

"Girls are regarded as poor mathematicians and scientists – but I've discovered that they are not – because teachers don't give them equal opportunities of answering in class."

Girl student, Uganda

"I'm not scared about getting AIDS now because we are taught about HIV at school."

Rebecca, 12, Malawi

"I began to understand that girls can also contribute towards the betterment of their families. I learnt about child rights, discriminations against girls and women and its impact on communities. I also learnt how to plan and undertake activities with others."

"I was quite surprised to learn that there are techniques for effective communication with others. A new world was opening out for me and I was very excited. Suddenly I did not feel so helpless, now I knew that with some more effort, I could help my mother look after the family needs."

Safia, Pakistan

QUALITY CONTENT

Quality content includes relevant curriculum and learning materials developed in the context of national goals for education. A relevant curriculum is both a mirror of what goes on in the community and a window into the rest of the country and the world and a better, more peaceful future for all people. It is relevant and sensitive to both boys and girls. The curricula and materials should ensure that learners can read, use numbers and be able to use life skills in real life. The latter should include knowledge about rights, gender, health, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace. Quality content is appropriate to children's level of learning and in languages that both students and teachers understand. Governments should adopt relevant, student-centred and non-discriminatory curriculum plans that are easily understood by teachers.

QUALITY FOR GIRLS

Girls are often invisible in curriculum content and images. This means that girls may not find many illustrations or stories of girls and women in textbooks and other learning materials – especially not of notable, empowered girls and women. It also means that girls are often told to take certain courses and not to take others. For example, girls may be told that they shouldn't take science or mathematics courses. If they are able to enrol in those courses, the textbooks and teaching are often geared to the boys. Learning to identify gender bias in the curriculum is a critical component of quality education for all.

Teaching girls skills for life – good decision-making and self-confidence, for example, and how to identify gender bias – is also crucial to empowerment. These skills will enable girls to better apply their knowledge throughout their lives.



“The most important thing for me has been the opportunity I have had to express my feelings, to say what I feel, this is the difference with other schools, where that does not happen.”

Sara, eighth-grader, Dominican Republic

“Things are much better now. There are no more quarrels, and we all help each other.... We are respected here in our school.”

Rav, 11, the Philippines

[on her school becoming part of the Child-Friendly School System initiative in the Philippines]

“We girls...usually cry that sciences are difficult in our community/schools. This is because girls in our districts lack good teachers, and because we lack ambition in our schools, to guide us. We even need role models to direct us into good situations for our bright future.

“We do really appeal to the government for their support, to help girls avoid this thinking by introducing to us some career guidance in our schools and setting up discussion groups inside the school and outside it. And by opening up some job opportunities for girls in their communities or schools. Government, girls are crying for help. Help, we are left behind.”

Bridget, student, Uganda

PROCESSES THAT SUPPORT QUALITY EDUCATION

Processes that support quality education include well-trained teachers who continually engage in professional learning and development; well-managed, child-friendly and gender-fair classrooms and schools; skills-based, child-centred participatory methods; skilful assessment to facilitate learning; and appropriate technologies.

Children should be taught in languages they understand and through which they can learn.

Teaching practices should be based on the belief that all students can learn.

Education systems and communities should support good living and working conditions for teachers. Supervisors should provide administrative support and leadership.

Girls' learning styles, which may be different from boys', should be respected, and they should be given equal chances to think, create and learn.

And families and communities should support schools by helping make decisions that will benefit all.

QUALITY FOR GIRLS

Within the same classroom, girls and boys often have very different and unequal learning experiences. Teachers may call on boys more than on girls, or assign science and computer studies to boys and domestic subjects to girls. Girls are often pushed into non-professional courses. These practices discriminate against girls. Teachers should receive careful training in how to interact with and encourage all students equally. Administrators should monitor what goes on in classrooms to make sure that teachers are not acting in discriminatory ways, however subtle and unintended.



UNICEF/01-0174/PIROZZI

“I like going to school and want to continue so that I can become a teacher. If my father tells me I have to leave school to marry, I will...[she hesitates]...I will give him my decision, which is that first I must be educated.”

Rihana, 11, Sudan

“Before I went to school, there were so many things I couldn’t do.... I’ve always dreamed of becoming a doctor some day, but I thought that dream could never come true.... It may still not happen, but now that I’m getting an education, I’d like to think I’m one step closer to my goal.

“When I have children, I’ll make sure they all go to school and pursue their studies. No marriage will ever stop that.”

Raweya, 15, Egypt

“I’m going to be a teacher. My teacher is smart and nice, and I want to be able to teach other children. I hope one day I can be a good teacher like her.”

Zakia, 10, Afghanistan

“[E]ducation and the teaching of tolerance will play a vital role in the way women are treated. It has been said time and again that the girls of today are the women of tomorrow.”

Karen, 17, Trinidad and Tobago

OUTCOMES

From a quality basic education come healthy children who can read and write critically and access mathematics, science and available technologies and other skills for life. Other outcomes are enhanced human development and national development; that is, life-long learning and positive participation in society.

OUTCOMES FOR WHAT?

LITERACY, NUMERACY
AND OTHER SKILLS FOR LIFE



HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING,
EMPOWERMENT AND POSITIVE
PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY

QUALITY FOR GIRLS

One outcome of quality girls' education is that more women will have skills and confidence and will participate and contribute to society in new ways. Giving girls' education increased support and recognition also has an inter-generational impact. Educated mothers educate their daughters and sons. This is an invaluable outcome of basic education and a key to achieving Education For All.

Ensuring quality for all learners, especially those who have been excluded in the past, is labour-intensive, time-consuming and costly, but for the good of humanity, we can and we must achieve it.

When quality basic education is available, more girls and boys will participate and participate enthusiastically, and parents will see returns on their investments in their children's education.

We will achieve Education For All.

THE ANONYMOUS TEACHER

This is the real magician.

It can only be considered magic that a human being

With little or no training
With little support or professional guidance
Who lives in a thatched hut, badly ventilated and scarcely illuminated
With no shops close by, and water miles away
At five or ten kilometres from school, that she or he will have to walk
Two times a day (in the morning and the afternoon)
Who receives a salary just enough to buy a week's food, how many times paid late
And that doesn't even buy clothes or furniture

...Is able to make a child...

Who walked five to ten kilometres to get to school
After a night sleeping on a ragged mat
In a hut with many cracks and roaming cold
Not having eaten much
After having had to complete domestic chores

...Learn to read, write and count...

In the shadow of a tree
Sitting on the ground
In groups of 70 children
With no chalk or didactic means
With no books or notebooks
With no pens or pencils

It's magic, for the esoteric; a miracle, for the religious. Heroism, for the people and for each child who, from that nothing, acquires knowledge and develops skills.

These are the anonymous heroes of each nation. They are not heroes of war. Their only weapons are a tremendous love for children and a tenacious desire to contribute to a better world. They are heroes of peace.

(from the UNICEF country office in Mozambique) Translated from the original Portuguese.
Reprinted from *The State of the World's Children 2002* report.

Published by UNICEF
Editorial and Publications Section
Division of Communication
3 United Nations Plaza, H-9F
New York, NY 10017, USA

E-mail: pubdoc@unicef.org
Website: www.unicef.org

April 2002

unicef 
United Nations Children's Fund