TO JUMP-START DEVELOPMENT
In the Millennium Declaration of September 2000, Member States of the United Nations made a most passionate commitment to address the crippling poverty and multiplying misery that grip many areas of the globe. “We will spare no effort,” they affirmed, “to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected.”

Governments set a date of 2015 by which they would meet the Millennium Development Goals: 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 develop a global partnership for development. While achieving each goal is critical to development, two are considered by leaders in the international community to be central to all others – universal education, and gender equality and empowering women.

Universal education might seem a relatively straightforward goal but it has proven as difficult as any to achieve. Decades after commitments and reaffirmations of those commitments have been made to ensure a quality education for every child, some 121 million children are still denied this right. Despite thousands of successful projects in countries around the globe, gender parity in education – in access to school, successful achievement and completion – is as elusive as ever and girls continue to systematically lose out on the benefits that an education affords.

As a result, the children whose lives would have been saved if their mothers had been educated continue to die. Those boys and girls who would have been healthier had
their mothers been educated continue to suffer needlessly. The reduction in poverty, hunger and HIV/AIDS that would follow if all children were educated remains an idealist’s dream.

It doesn’t have to be that way. Universal education, and all the good that it will bring, is possible. Investing in girls’ education today – not just with money but with energy and enthusiasm, commitment and concern, focus and intensity – is a strategy that will protect the rights of all children to a quality education, and a strategy that will jump-start all other development goals.

But, the signs in the first three years since the Millennium Declaration are not encouraging for universal education, or gender parity in education or for any of the other Millennium Development Goals. The events of 11 September 2001 and the battle against terrorism around the globe have occupied much of the world’s headline attention and soaked up resources that could have been devoted to human development. Now, the world will have to strain to the utmost to meet the commitments of the Goals. If progress is not accelerated, the levels of hunger that threaten survival will persist in some regions of the world for an inconceivable 100 years. Millions of children under five will continue to die needlessly over the same time. In sub-Saharan Africa, at the current rate of progress, it will be well into the 22nd century before all children are in school, child mortality is reduced by two thirds and poverty reduced by half. (See Figure 1, Projections for the Millennium Development Goals.)

If specific attention is not paid to the needs of girls such as these two from Nepal, universal primary education will be unattainable.
The most urgent goal of all

More immediately than the 2015 date, the Millennium Development Goal of gender parity in primary and secondary education is set to be achieved by 2005 – a full 10 years before the others. Not only an end in itself but also part of the broader goal of education for all, the 2005 goal is the first test of the world’s commitment to break poverty’s stranglehold.

Many countries, however, will fall short of the 2005 target for gender parity in education if nothing is done now to accelerate change. What’s more, this failure will jeopardize the goals set for 2015. Without the foundation of gender parity in education as the necessary step towards the equality of women, any achievements towards the later goals will not be sustainable. Thus the 2005 goal of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education becomes the first step toward meeting the 2015 goals – and the most urgent one of all. (See Panel on acceleration strategy, page 3.)

Education for all children

The international community’s commitment to universal education was first set down in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and later reiterated in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. At the 1990 World Summit for Children, world leaders not only reaffirmed their commitment that girls and boys alike should have a quality basic education, they also pledged to place their emphasis on reducing the disparities that had existed between rates of school enrolment for decades.

PANEL 1

The acceleration strategy: 25 by 2005

There was no doubt about the benefits of education when 24 Ministers of Education and other high officials from West African countries met recently to discuss investment options in education to get boys and girls into school. As a delegate from Sierra Leone put it, “We have the experience that ignorance kills.”

The Ministers and education experts were invited by UNICEF and the World Bank to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, to reaffirm their commitment to education for all, including girls. Before they even sat down at the conference table, many of the Ministers had already signed the Ouagadougou Declaration that recognizes the importance of girls’ education for their countries’ development, and commits governments to accelerate efforts to get as many girls as boys in school. This is not an easy task in a region where less than 50 per cent of girls are in school and where gender discrimination is firmly rooted in social and cultural beliefs. Making matters worse, almost half the countries in the region have been ravaged by conflicts in recent years that have destroyed infrastructure and plunged education systems into crisis.

The mood was optimistic nonetheless. The expertise exchanged at the meeting and in numerous programmes and community actions showed that the right investment choices can lead to real and sustainable change. In a closing statement, one of the Ministers echoed many of his colleagues when he declared “We can do it! Let me tell you, we are bringing the gender gap to zero by 2005.”

The Millennium Development Goal – for gender parity in primary and secondary education – is supposed to be realized by 2005. If specific attention is not paid to the needs of girls, universal primary education will be unattainable. With this in mind, UNICEF has launched the 25 by 2005 initiative. This is not intended to replace existing initiatives and efforts, but to complement and enhance them in the interest of accelerating progress on girls’ education. The strategy seeks to
Despite these commitments, the ideal of universal education remains unfulfilled and gender gaps persist until today.

The 2005 target date for gender parity is attached not only to the Millennium Development Goals, but to the goals that were first put forth at the World Conference on Education For All in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, and then reaffirmed at the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal. Here, too, girls’ education was afforded first attention: “The most urgent priority is to ensure access to, and improve the quality of education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation....”

So it is that for more than a decade, the Education For All (EFA) campaign, led by UNESCO, has embraced a mission that includes both advocacy and “a sense of accountability towards commitments.” Through its Global Monitoring Reports, EFA assesses individual countries’ yearly progress and champions educational policies that will increase enrolment rates and success in school. In its 2002 Report, EFA noted that although 86 countries have already achieved gender parity in primary enrolment, and another 36 appear close to meeting that goal, 31 countries, the majority of which are located in sub-Saharan Africa, are at high risk of not achieving the goal by 2015.

Following Dakar, 13 agencies formed the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (see Box 1) in the EFA spirit to mount a “sustained campaign to improve the quality and availability of girls’ education” that works at both the

help all countries eliminate gender disparity in education by 2005, with a special focus on 25 of the countries that are judged to be most at risk of failing to achieve this goal, including 8 West African countries. Among the 25 countries chosen are 10 with more than a million girls out of school, 8 with a net enrolment rate for girls of less than 40 per cent and 13 with a gender gap higher than 10 per cent.

So what will happen in these selected countries? Firstly, UNICEF will need to win the argument for acceleration at the national and local levels. If girls’ education is to become an urgent national priority it will certainly mean involving the country’s leader, making him or her both an advocate for and an agent of change. It will be equally important to win over local community leaders and use their statements to promote girls’ enrolment in and attendance at school. It will mean seizing every possible opportunity to advance the case, to mobilize enthusiasm and resources, and involve the media, private companies and local communities in promoting a sense of national responsibility and concern about girls who are denied their right to schooling.

Secondly, girls’ education will be treated as a case for urgent – even emergency – action. Country offices will be proactive, identifying out-of-school girls and providing schooling for them. The aim is to develop a package of intensive interventions that will produce results much more quickly than if business had continued as usual. Pilot projects that have proved successful at local level will be rolled out on as large a scale as possible. New staff will be recruited to form action teams who will pull out all the stops over the next two years to mobilize girls’ enrolment.

The 25 selected countries fulfilled one or more of the following five criteria: low enrolment rates for girls; gender gaps of more than 10 per cent in primary education; countries with more than 1 million girls out of school; countries included on the World Bank’s Education For All Fast Track Initiative; and countries hard hit by a range of crises that affect school opportunities for girls, such as HIV/AIDS and conflict.

Afghanistan
Bangladesh
Benin
Bhutan
Bolivia
Burkina Faso
Central African Republic
Chad
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Djibouti
Eritrea
Ethiopia
Guinea
India
Malawi
Mali
Nepal
Nigeria
Pakistan
Papua New Guinea
Sudan
Turkey
United Republic of Tanzania
Yemen
Zambia
Each of the 25 countries starts from a different place in terms of educational provision, cultural context and the position of women and girls in society, and will have to tailor its accelerated programme accordingly. There is a rich and wide range of practical measures that can be adopted and adapted. Among them are: operating double shifts in existing schools; making small rural schools viable through multigrade teaching; opening schools in tents or under trees, using the ‘school-in-a-box’ kits that UNICEF has developed for use in emergencies; expanding, improving and winning official recognition for existing non-formal education schemes; and providing mobile schools for remote rural populations and transient or nomadic groups.

The success of the 25 by 2005 initiative depends primarily on the extent to which national governments respond to it as an opportunity. UNICEF’s role is to accompany governments on the road to gender equality in education. This is a new idea that seeks to transcend the well-established frame-

Investing in girls’ education today…
is a strategy that will protect the rights of all children to quality education…and a strategy that will jump-start all other development goals.
FIGURE 1  PROJECTIONS FOR THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

If progress does not accelerate, it will take more than 100 years for some regions to achieve some of the Millennium Development goals.

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<th>Poverty</th>
<th>Hunger</th>
<th>Primary education</th>
<th>Gender equality</th>
<th>Child mortality</th>
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*Region is considered to have achieved the goal because it has low human poverty (below 10%) in the most recent year for the relevant goal. Calculations based on feature 2.1 in Human Development Report 2001.

children out of school. At any moment, they are being denied their right to a basic education, as nations fail to make primary education compulsory, free, available, accessible, acceptable – and adaptable to girls and boys alike. And scores of countries are without the talent, energy and creativity these millions of children could bring to the development of their societies. (See Figure 2, Trends in gender disparities.)

The impact of failure

Think for a moment of a nine-year-old girl who is currently denied her right to an education. The two years until the end of 2005 may not seem like much time to those responsible for delivering gender parity by that date. It may seem reasonable to accept that the target is impossible, and to settle for only an incremental improvement.

But to that girl the next two years are vital and irreplaceable. Once lost, they cannot be reclaimed. Going to school will transform her life. It will offer her learning and an expanded sense of her own potential, increasing her self-confidence, her social and negotiation skills, her earning power and her ability to protect herself against violence and ill health. Education will open up the world to her.

If the school gates remain shut and barred to this young girl, the gulf between her and the woman she could have become will widen.

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BOX 2

CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL, 121 MILLION
65 MILLION GIRLS, 56 MILLION BOYS

Some recent reports say that there are 104 million primary-school-age children out of school worldwide, others estimate 115 million. UNICEF puts the number higher – at 121 million. Most of these children are girls.

Why the differences?

Some countries calculate the number of out-of-school children by subtracting the numbers enrolled from the total number of primary-school-age children in the country. But what sounds fairly straightforward is anything but.

1. In some countries, especially those without birth registration, determining the age of children is an imprecise science.
2. In some, there may be an incentive, usually tied to finances, to overestimate enrolment numbers.
3. And for some countries, particularly those in conflict regions, there are difficulties getting recent, accurate population census data on school-age children.
4. And finally, children who are enrolled in school do not always attend, dropping out because of their own illness, or to take care of sick siblings or parents, or to work and help their own poor families survive.

For this last reason, we have recently begun to use household surveys – asking mothers or caregivers whether their young children attend school. Here too, precision is difficult: both because of the problems getting the total number of school-age children in a country and because it depends on accurate reporting by mothers and caregivers, many of whom might be reluctant to say they are not sending their children to school. Nonetheless, these more appropriate surveys often provide the most accurate measure of children in school.

What UNICEF does

UNICEF uses enrolment data for most countries and survey data when enrolment data is either not available or is older than the survey data. This means that our methods might differ country to country and that our numbers might differ from other agencies and organizations. Our use of attendance is the main difference in our numbers of children out of school and those of other agencies.

Why use different methods?

Because data collection is not always uniform, reporting is often spotty and children too easily fall, unnoticed, into the margins of society, we will not gamble that any one way will ensure that we have accounted for all children, whether in or out of school. Using different methods – enrolment and attendance – helps get us closer to the real number of children who might be denied their right to an education, and so in need of our intervention.
with every passing month. Once she misses her chance to attend primary school, she also loses out on secondary education and beyond. The price of losing two school years would be catastrophic to any child but 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.

The negative effects of not attending school are greater for girls than for boys – and their impact transfers to the next generation of both boys and girls. Whether educated or not, girls are more at risk than boys from HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation and child trafficking. Without the knowledge and life skills that school can provide, these risks are multiplied. So it is that school allows girls and their families multiple protections and its absence means multiple exposures.

**Reasons for exclusion**

Why are girls 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, summarized here and addressed throughout this report, are interrelated.

**Failure of accountability.** Rather than recognized as the right of every child, education is too often seen simply as a ‘good thing’ for most children. As a result, while it is considered desirable to have as many children in school as a country can afford, it is not considered obligatory or necessary that governments mobilize the needed resources so that all children can complete a quality education.
Parents often do not realize that governments have the obligation to make education available to all children, and attribute their children’s failure to attend school as some failure of their own. They are not likely to demand that governments fulfil this fundamental obligation to their younger citizens.

In the face of competing demands on public resources and political will, education loses out. In times of fiscal constraints or social crises – for example, HIV/AIDS and the upheavals that attend violent conflicts or natural disasters – education for some children is easily sacrificed.

And because of the persistent and often subtle gender discrimination that runs through most societies, it is girls who are sacrificed first, being the last enrolled and first withdrawn from schools when times get tough.

**Failure of understanding.** Human rights principles have not been integrated into economic development programmes, and the ultimate objective of development – human well-being instead of economic performance – has thus been lost. Those who are the most marginalized – women, girls and the poor – lose out the most. Such discrimination, unrecorded, leaves the rights of the marginalized far from the thoughts of development policy makers.

In addition, how educated women contribute to any country’s development has yet to be widely recognized. Despite the scientific evidence, educating girls is rarely discussed in policy circles as a way to ensure social

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**PANEL 2**

**Education, rights holders and duty bearers**

Máximo Quispe Gutiérrez, a 62-year-old widower, lives in Cochas, Peru, with his eight children. He works a small farm plot, raises a few head of livestock and is determined to see his sons and daughters get an education – no matter what the odds.

“Everyone told me not to send my children to school, especially the girls,” he says. “They said I should only enrol the younger boys. The oldest boy was expected to help me in the field because I am old.”

“People from Punkukunata Kichaspa project came to the community and told us how important it was to send girls to school and how unfair it is to make them work in the house only,” said Mr. Gutiérrez. “I’m going to enrol my eight children in school. They said their age doesn’t matter; they all can go.”

The Punkukunata Kichaspa project (Opening Doors for Girls’ Education – see page 88) initiated by the Ministry of Education, USAID and UNICEF in October 1999, is helping Mr. Gutiérrez realize his dream of educating all his children. A community-based project, it brings the global commitments – to the Millennium Development Goal of universal education and to Education For All – down to the local level.

Before Punkukunata Kichaspa came to his village, Mr. Gutiérrez assumed that his children would be illiterate like him. Life seemed to be mapped out for the next generation. His eldest son, 16-year-old Máximo, tended the animals and his three other sons helped in the field. The three oldest girls worked in the home, preparing meals and taking care of Liza, the youngest child.

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**The human rights-based approach to education**

Punkukunata Kichaspa is child rights in action.

It brings together rights holders – children and duty bearers – parents, communities, national and local governments, international agencies – and expects something of them all. Each with a unique role to play, they share a common responsibility of doing what they can to make sure
progress. As a result, investment in girls’ education is often bypassed when budget decisions are being negotiated.

Failure of theory. Historically, the predominant views of development and the financing mechanisms accompanying them have focused on single-factor motors of development: economic growth and structural adjustment, which underestimate the value of social development, education in general and girls’ education in particular. Such approaches do not begin by asking what resources are required to fund education, health, nutrition and shelter for children. They never get to the question of how to raise required resources without destabilizing macroeconomic parameters. The macroeconomic parameters are set first, with resources for people-centred investments, including those that address gender equality, as only a residual consideration.

Just as importantly, development paradigms have generally failed to address the unequal relationships between men and women, and failed to take into account women’s potential to contribute in the private and public sectors to a country’s development. As a result, issues affecting women and girls are nearly invisible in the theories, policies and practices of development.

Failure of strategy. Even among those committed to the goal of Education For All, there is often a traditional perspective that looks only to the education sector when identifying problems and developing solutions. As a result, policies and programmes are often narrow and single-focused, though it is a multisectoral approach

Cascading responsibilities

No one individual or one government can ensure that all children will enjoy their right to a quality primary school education. This right can only be fully realized when all barriers to access, attendance, attainment and achievement are removed and when all disparities, including gender disparities, in these four areas are eliminated.

But for barriers to fall and for disparities to disappear, two groups – rights holders and duty bearers – will have to do their part. Rights holders include all those without an education, whether they be children, young people or adults. Those responsible for seeing the right to an education fulfilled include the international community as well as a hierarchy of duty bearers with different roles and levels of accountability: parents, households and communities; teachers and managers; planners and administrators; national and local governments; non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations.

As each of these groups attempts to fulfil its part in protecting the rights of children, each needs support. Poor parents, for example, might have difficulty freeing their children from household tasks or income-generating activities in order to attend school. They may find it difficult to meet costs related to school attendance and completion. To meet their responsibilities, they need the support of government actions, such as the abolishment of all school fees.

As another example, teachers and school managers need the level of education and training that will enable them to carry out their responsibilities. Their salary needs and conditions of service must be met, so they can focus on the students. Mostly they need the trust and respect of the community and the belief that the job they do is valued and respected.

The role of governments

It is the role of governments to enact appropriate policies, implement sector plans and secure the
necessary resources to provide education for all children. They also have an obligation to dismantle obstacles and barriers that diminish opportunities or prevent citizens from realizing their right to education. Their unique responsibility is to secure the total package of resources that would be needed to ensure every child their right. Such a package typically includes: adequate national budgetary allocations to the education sector; priority allocation within the education budget to provide basic education to all citizens; national expertise and experience to provide the necessary capacity for planning and implementing education as a human right; external financial assistance where necessary, in the form of grants and loans to bridge the funding gap in education until economic growth can sustain a self-financed system; ongoing technical expertise and experiential knowledge that will accompany them through the difficult task of facilitating education as a human right.

The trade-off

Every day, Mr. Gutiérrez and his older children get up before sunrise to prepare meals. After all eight children are off to school, the widower heads out to farm the fields, his workload heavier for the time being, his family’s future expanded by a factor of eight.

Traditional perspectives often fail to take into account the gender issues that affect children’s access to school, those related to the differences between the needs of girls and boys, and the inequities in their roles, responsibilities and identities. Without a recognition of such differences, educational policies and practices are gender blind, when they should be gender sensitive. In such cases, the behaviour and attitudes of policy makers and practitioners at best fail to meet the particular needs of boys and girls and at worst sabotage their right to an education.

Challenging the status quo

With the rights of 65 million girls unmet and the Millennium Development Goals in peril, change is clearly needed. But it is needed at many levels and will not be achieved through enrolment drives alone. To successfully remove the barriers that prevent girls from accessing an education, and succeeding in and completing school, societies will inevitably have to deal with factors that are fundamental to the quality of life of the whole community. Girls’ education is so inextricably linked with the other facets of human development that to make it a priority is to also make change on a range of other fronts, from the health and status of women to early childhood care, from nutrition, water and sanitation to community empowerment, from the reduction of child labour and other forms of exploitation to the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

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A concerted global push is now needed to meet the Millennium Development Goals and the education goals of Dakar—as well as to realize the vision of the Special Session on Children to create a world fit for children. The effort is morally imperative; it must also be practical and it must be catalytic.

It is within this context that UNICEF’s long-standing commitment to girls’ education has assumed greater urgency and why we now call on all those concerned with human rights and the Millennium Development Goals to:

1. Accelerate actions in countries that display specific and flagrant gender discrimination against girls and boys, especially in those where either group is significantly at risk of being left out of school.

2. Embrace a human rights-based, multi-sectoral approach to development (see Annex B, page 91), in order to redress the multiple discriminatory situations that deny children their right to quality primary education.

By using a human rights model and a multi-sectoral approach to ensuring that all girls are educated, the world will necessarily have to address underlying inequities and gender discrimination. The results of such a global initiative will cover a broad landscape. It will create by 2005 a vanguard generation of children who are living a lesson in equality. It will mean that schools, curricula and teachers are changing to become truly child-friendly, thereby offering a better education to all children equally. It will mean that all countries

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**FIGURE 2** TRENDS IN GENDER DISPARITIES IN PRIMARY EDUCATION (1990 – 1999)

Note: This figure shows changes on the gender parity index (GPI) in gross enrolment ratios in primary school education, by region.

Data refer to 1998/99.

Source: Adapted from ‘Figure 2.18: Trends in gender disparities in GER in primary school education (1990-1999)’ in EFA Global Monitoring Report 2002, UNESCO.
have acknowledged that education is an urgent priority and that developing countries have shifted their resources to attract and retain girls and boys in school. It will mean that donor countries have lived up to their pledges to support development. It will be a powerful global expression of commitment to children’s rights.

The multiple global efforts to ensure the right of every girl and boy to an education – including the Education For All movement, the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative, the World Bank’s Fast-Track Initiative and the Global Movement for Children – must step up their work. The international community has committed itself, time and again, to fulfilling the education rights of girls as well as boys. The research community has demonstrated, in study after study, the social value of providing girls with an education.

Millions of children depend on our actions. Having 65 million more girls in school, alongside millions of boys – each learning, growing and thriving – will put new life into development and help create the healthier, fairer and more democratic world we have been striving towards for decades.
Millennium Development Goals

Two goals – achieve universal primary education and promote gender equality and empower women – are critical to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. Every year of schooling completed by girls is a step towards eliminating poverty.

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

Breastfeeding
Percentage of children under 6 months of age exclusively breastfed 1995-2002
Selected countries

Secondary education for girls
Females as percentage of males in secondary schools
1995-2000
- Over 100%
- 91%-100%
- 81%-90%
- 80% and under
- No data