ACCELERATING PROGRESS IN GIRLS’ EDUCATION

Out-of-school girls need our attention now. The Millennium Development Goal to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015, cannot become another unkept promise. Coming up short will call into question the sincerity of the pledge made by all the world’s governments and condemn yet another generation of girls to ignorance and poverty. Every year a girl is denied her right to education increases her risk of being exploited and abused, and her vulnerability to disease, including HIV/AIDS.

Yet if we fulfil our promise, we could transform our world. Every year a girl is educated is a step towards eliminating poverty, advancing human development, and stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS. Accelerating progress in girls’ education will also get boys in school. It will promote the values of tolerance, equality and mutual respect, providing all children a chance to grow up with health, peace and dignity.
25 BY 2005
A global campaign to achieve gender parity in education by 2005:

• A call to action in 25 countries to maximize the number of girls in school by 2005

• A commitment to educate every girl so she may assume her rightful place as an active participant in her country’s development

• A pioneering collaboration between UNICEF, governments, United Nations partners, civil society and the private sector

• A partnership in which UNICEF is ‘accompanying’ countries and partner agencies through all stages of the process

At the same time, UNICEF continues to work to increase popular support for girls’ education in all countries around the world.
WHY
Girls make up the majority of the more than 121 million children out of school. Their numbers increase in times of conflict, social crisis, poverty and natural disasters.

Girls’ education is a human rights issue and the obligation of all governments. For UNICEF, ensuring the right to education, for girls as well as boys, is both a moral and social imperative.

Girls are in double jeopardy because they are disadvantaged within groups that are already discriminated against, such as rural populations or the poor.

Girls’ education is a core development issue. Educated women are key to breaking the cycle of inter-generational poverty.

Investments in girls’ education — particularly those directed to improving the quality of education — also benefit boys. The reverse is not always the case.
HOW?
UNICEF is consolidating nearly six decades of experience and the expertise of our partners – other United Nations agencies, the academic community and hundreds of non-governmental organizations – to identify out-of-school girls and get them into the classroom.

This means taking interventions that we know work and applying them to individual communities. Many of the measures are practical, such as creating double shifts in existing schools, making small rural schools viable through multigrade teaching, operating ‘mobile schools’ for nomadic communities or ‘tent schools’ in emergency situations, and using incentives for enrolment and attendance. The goal is to target interventions more effectively and help countries take them to scale. The lessons learned from the 25 pilot countries will be applied to other countries until all the world’s children, girls as well as boys, enjoy their right to a quality education. UNICEF is providing a customized package of resources to support countries so that they can identify, implement and scale up interventions to get results.

This resource package will help countries:
• Customize their interventions
• Build country-level capacities and partnerships
• Address their emerging needs through guidance, technical notes, networking and ‘rapid response mechanisms’
• Mobilize community support
• Strengthen problem-solving capacities
• Create a databank of resource persons, physical assets and reference materials
• Build action teams to solve problems and keep initiatives on track
• Implement short-term measures and incentives while building long-term solutions.
ACCOMPANYING COUNTRIES

Countries must take the lead in meeting their education goals. But governments sometimes need help – and not just with funding. UNICEF is prepared to ‘accompany’ countries in achieving their goals through continuous and long-term support. This means sharing their vision and objectives, while providing constructive support for advocacy and change, where needed. It is about being involved in the daily decision-making and problem-solving that national officials and local communities will invariably face.

The concept of accompanying countries does not imply that UNICEF intends to adopt a policy of acting alone. On the contrary, it means that UNICEF will coordinate and collaborate with partner agencies, donors, civil society and the private sector as they proceed to do what they do best.

MOBILIZING SUPPORT

A sea change in social attitudes, policy direction and programme support is needed to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education. A national ethos of ‘no girl out of school’ must be created so that everyone is concerned about girls not attending school and everyone is actively engaged in the movement to educate all children.

Success depends upon advocacy at all levels to:

• Create a groundswell of local demand for open budgets, transparency and government accountability
• Transform political will into government action to fulfil their obligations on girls’ education and ensure that this is reflected in national plans and budgets
• Mobilize financial resources and donor commitment to girls’ education
• Create synergy with other initiatives, such as the Education For All Fast-Track Initiative led by the World Bank.

NURTURING PARTNERSHIPS

Local, national and international partnerships are vital to improve planning, coordination and the delivery of services for girls’ education.

Effective coordination is especially crucial at the country level to ensure that resources are not
wasted and that local interventions complement one another in a way that maximizes results. To strengthen and expand country-level partnerships, we are:

- Building on existing mechanisms and networks, particularly those that function well and are familiar to those working in the country
- Taking mechanisms such as the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative to the country level and broadening them to include multilateral and bilateral donors, civil society and the private sector
- Building on lessons learned in 34 countries from the African Girls Education Initiative and adapting them in Asia.

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ADOPTING A MULTISECTORAL APPROACH

UNICEF is promoting a new and more cohesive approach to service delivery that crosses multiple sectors and uses gender as a lens to accelerate progress on girls’ education. It is UNICEF’s experience that integrated actions across a range of sectors yield the greatest results. For example, interventions in health and nutrition will not only improve a child’s chances of survival and sound development, but they will also contribute to better performance in school.
INTEGRATED ACTIONS GET RESULTS
**IMPACT ON EDUCATION**

In many countries, HIV/AIDS is having a catastrophic effect on the demand for education, on the supply of education, and on the quality of education. Yet education is also our single most effective weapon in preventing HIV/AIDS and ameliorating its impact on children and young people.

**WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE**

Ensure that HIV/AIDS is not simply addressed in the curriculum or through peer counselling and school clubs. This means transforming schools into bastions against HIV/AIDS by implementing a raft of measures that will alter the culture of schooling so that children feel protected, supported and confident. This will not only improve the quality of schooling, but will also combat the epidemic.
THE RHYTHM OF SCHOOLING

IMPACT ON EDUCATION

For many young children, especially girls in rural, disadvantaged communities, household chores and income-generating tasks become a part of their daily routine. Once such routines are ingrained, it becomes difficult to introduce schooling into a child’s life. This is a major reason why many children are not sent to school at an appropriate age or not sent at all.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Provide quality, community-based early childhood care. By ensuring that a child spends a few hours each day in some form of early learning, we are, in effect, reserving a place for schooling in the child’s daily routine. Starting school becomes easier since it does not crowd out other established activities. At the same time, early childhood care helps to introduce the rhythm of schooling – regular attendance at designated times – into a child’s life at an early age.
HEALTH AND NUTRITION

IMPACT ON EDUCATION

Too many children are denied the proper health care and nutrition they need to prepare their minds and bodies to learn.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Use nutrition and health interventions as incentives for enrolment and to improve learning. These could include school meals, routine health checks, growth monitoring, micronutrient programmes and worm eradication. Moreover, children can become guardians of their own health and that of their family by learning about health and nutrition in school.
WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Ensure that every primary school is equipped with separate facilities for boys and girls, and that every school, without exception, has a source of safe drinking water. Schools should also teach children skills to sustain a hygienic and healthy lifestyle, which they in turn can pass on to their families and communities.

IMPACT ON EDUCATION

Water and sanitation facilities in schools can be critical factors in determining whether children, especially girls, attend school and complete their education. When present, such facilities allow children their dignity and privacy. In addition, they promote good hygiene and children’s general well-being. Yet many schools have very poor facilities.
IMPACT ON EDUCATION

Violence or sexual abuse in schools can prevent children, especially girls, from enrolling and contribute to absenteeism and poor classroom performance. Where schools offer a safe and secure learning environment, children can learn skills that protect them from violence, abuse and exploitation and offer a real alternative to child labour. They can also provide a refuge for those who are already being exploited or who have lost a primary caregiver to HIV/AIDS or other causes.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Schools and other learning spaces have to be safe and secure for children to learn. Teachers need the support and skills to make this happen. Education has to be made available to all children without discrimination.
WHAT SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE

• All girls and boys in quality schools all the time.

• No more gender discrimination.

• We know that obstacles can be overcome – even in the most difficult of circumstances.

• In Afghanistan in 1999, UNICEF started home schools when girls were prohibited from attending public school. After two years, home schools were reaching 58,000 Afghan children, both girls and boys. UNICEF, with partner agencies, then assisted the new Afghan government to get over 3 million children back in school within a year.

• In violence-ridden Colombia, 11,000 children are enrolled in ‘child-friendly’ schools – havens of safety that are also welcoming and effective learning environments.

• In Ethiopia, community outreach and teacher training led to a 14 per cent increase in the primary school enrolment of girls in just one year.

• In the Syrian Arab Republic, nearly 3,000 adolescent girls are attending ‘back to school’ classes that provide disadvantaged girls with basic education in half the usual time.

• Success is taking examples like these and multiplying them a thousandfold in countries around the world.
GETTING THERE

For UNICEF, setting goals is an important step to reaching them. Our objectives for 2003–2005:

For the 25 countries:

• Make girls’ education a priority in national education plans
• Provide more opportunities for learning for girls out of school
• Increase water, sanitation, health care, school meals and other services that will improve the learning environment and student’s capacities
• Increase the number and quality of teachers and other learning resources
• Mainstream and scale-up successful initiatives in girls’ education.

In all countries:

• Secure strong political commitment to girls’ education and gender equity
• Engage all partners in an advocacy campaign to get more girls in school and provide them with the support they need to stay there
• Involve civil society in planning, budgeting, implementing and monitoring girls’ education
• Make schools safe havens and centres of community empowerment
• Link up with major education initiatives that promote positive reform.
WE INVITE

countries and partner agencies around the world to join us.
25 ACCELERATION COUNTRIES

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
“If we hope to create a peaceful tomorrow then providing girls and boys an equal chance for quality basic education is our only choice today.”

Carol Bellamy
Executive Director
United Nations Children’s Fund