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# Investing in Girls' Empowerment for MDG Acceleration

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## Children are everybody's business.

Children represent boundless potential and opportunity; they are the doctors, teachers, inventors and leaders of tomorrow.

Around 250 million children either fail to make it to grade 4 or do not reach the minimum level of learning.<sup>i</sup> Moreover, 6.6 million die before age 5, impacting global development.<sup>ii</sup>

Children and young people should be recognized as critical partners for sustainable change. Children and young people who have the education, skills and opportunities to participate and innovate become effective advocates, problem-solvers and agents for positive change.

## Healthy and well-nourished children are the foundation for

## every society's sustainable future.

Saving children's lives is an investment in a nation's future. When children come into this world, they bring with them an enormous amount of potential and possibility that can shape the future of society.

Healthy children, particularly girls, are more likely to live longer, stay in school, have fewer children, earn more, and be productive members of their society, creating benefits that reverberate through future generations. That is what motivates UNICEF to work with partners in the 'A Promise Renewed'<sup>iii</sup> movement towards eliminating preventable child deaths.

Child survival requires reducing inequalities and simultaneous action as outlined by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – including poverty reduction, health, water and sanitation,

education, gender equality, maternal mortality reduction, and environmental sustainability.

Stunting causes irreversible physical and mental damage for children. It negatively affects school attendance and performance.<sup>iv</sup> This, in turn, can reduce later adult income-generation by as much as 22 per cent.<sup>v</sup>

Every US dollar invested in reducing chronic undernutrition can result in a return of up to US\$30 through improved health and education outcomes.<sup>vi</sup>

## Education plays an essential role in economic growth and reducing poverty, and contributes to peace and security.

The greatest returns on investment are obtained during the earliest years of life, especially during preschool.<sup>vii</sup> Analyses in 73 low and middle income countries



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have shown<sup>viii</sup> that increasing preschool enrolment by 25 per cent to 50 per cent<sup>ix</sup> can result in a return of \$6.40 to \$17.60 for every dollar invested – this is one of the largest returns on investment in the social sector.<sup>x</sup>

As little as four years of primary schooling can boost a farmer's productivity by nearly nine per cent.<sup>xi</sup>

171 million people could be lifted out of poverty if all students in low-income countries had an education that allowed them to acquire basic reading skills.<sup>xii</sup>

Expanding access to education reduces the risk of conflict.

**Learning in school and quality education drive economic growth in societies – this is crucial to ending poverty and boosting shared prosperity.**

It is not just years in school that make a difference in a country's economic growth – it is also about the quality of learning.

Where education does not result in higher economic growth, learning levels are low. School and education are only useful if children are actually acquiring knowledge and skills.<sup>xiii</sup>

The expansion of schooling without improvement in learning cannot adequately equip children for their futures.<sup>xiv</sup>

Business has significant impacts on children and educating children has sig-

nificant impacts on profitability for business. Business has enormous power to protect children from harm and improve their lives through the way they operate their facilities, develop and market products, provide services, and exert influence on economic and social development.

As workers retire in Western Europe and the US, wealthy countries will look to emerging markets and younger workers to fill their vacancies. By 2030, emerging markets are expected to contribute 65 per cent of the world's GDP.<sup>xv</sup>

Research shows skills to succeed at work – like literacy, basic math, and social skills – are acquired in primary and secondary school. In a 2012 survey, 43 per cent of global CEOs indicated that talent-related costs negatively affected their firm's profitability.<sup>xvi</sup>

**Change the world: invest in girls.**

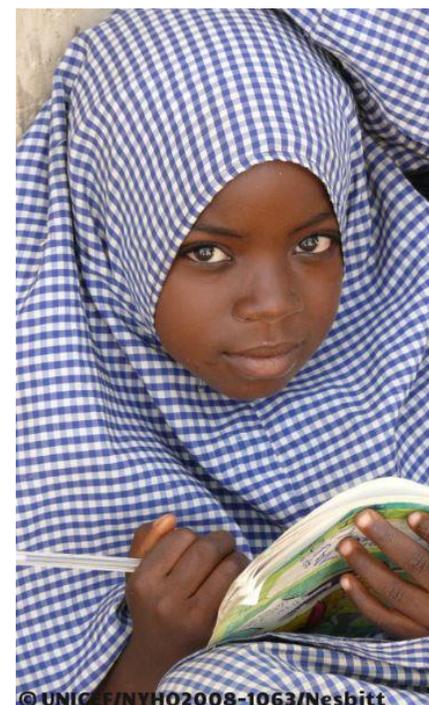
Girls' education, particularly at the secondary level, is the "magic bullet" for development and the most consistent driver of development goals.<sup>xvii</sup>

Girls' education is the one of the most powerful investments for development. Investing in girls can accelerate the fight against poverty and empower them to be valuable contributors to their communities and society at large.

Educated young women are less likely to die in childbirth, more likely to send their children to school, and better able to protect themselves and their children

from malnutrition, HIV/AIDS, trafficking, and sexual exploitation.<sup>xviii</sup>

An educated girl is more likely to get a job and earn a higher wage, and her nation's economy is likely to benefit as a result.



**UNICEF is uniquely positioned to bring change for girls, working with families, communities, civil society organizations, governments, private sector partners, and broader UN family.**

UNICEF and its partners deliver programmes that affect all aspects of a

child's life – from immunization, nutrition, and water and sanitation to education and protection – with a focus on girls, particularly the most vulnerable.

UNICEF and its partners offer sustainable solutions, innovations and ideas to accelerate the MDGs. These must be scaled up and prioritized to reach the most vulnerable and disadvantaged girls.

UNICEF and other UN partners developed '[The Smartest Investment: A Framework for Business Engagement in Education](#)' making the case to put education at the centre of business investment. The guide is an essential resource for companies to understand the business benefits of advancing education goals and align their operations with education priorities.

### Facts and figures: education

An educated girl can empower herself, lift her family, help her community, and change her country.

About 31 million of girls of primary school age and about 34 million girls of lower secondary school age are out of school globally.<sup>xix</sup>

Out of approximately 31 million girls of primary school age out of school, roughly 17 million girls are expected to never enrol in school.<sup>xx</sup>

57 million children of primary school age are not in school – over half of whom are girls.<sup>xxi</sup> Out of these, 28.5 million live in conflict affected countries, 55 per cent of whom are girls. Girls are the worst affected, as they are often victims

of rape and other sexual violence that accompanies armed conflicts.<sup>xxii</sup>

A girl with seven years of education marries four years later and has 2.2 fewer children.<sup>xxiii</sup>

A study done in 50 countries has shown that each additional year of average schooling in a country increased the average 40-year growth rate in GDP by about 0.37 percentage points.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Thousands of girls are kept from school due to: safety-related, financial, institutional and cultural barriers; pressure for early marriage; sexual harassment, school-related gender-based violence; religious constraints; domestic chores; and vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.<sup>xxv</sup>

There are approximately 774 million illiterate adults – 64 per cent of whom are women.<sup>xxvi</sup>

An educated mother is more likely to send her children to school.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Fifty-nine per cent fewer girls would become pregnant if all girls had a secondary education.<sup>xxviii</sup>

A child born to a mother who can read is 50 per cent more likely to survive past the age of five.<sup>xxix</sup>

Each extra year of a mother's schooling reduces the probability of an infant dying by 5 to 10 per cent.<sup>xxx</sup>

Over the past 40 years, child mortality has declined by over 50 per cent. This is associated with the increased educational attainment of women of reproductive age.<sup>xxxi</sup>

### Facts and figures: health and nutrition

Maternal deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth are an important component of mortality for girls aged 15-19 worldwide,<sup>xxxii</sup> accounting for 50,000 deaths each year.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Reducing child deaths by 4.25 per 1000 children born to mothers with low levels of education, can result in an almost 8 per cent increase in GDP per capita 10 years later.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

The risk of maternal death is 2.7 times higher among women with no education, and two times higher among women with 1-6 years of education than among women having more than 12 years of education.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Undernutrition reduces economic advancement by at least 8 per cent due to decreased productivity, poorer cognition and reduced schooling.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Reducing health inequality by 1 per cent per year could increase a country's annual rate of GDP growth by 0.15 per cent.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

For about US\$100 per child, a bundle of interventions could reduce chronic undernutrition by 36 per cent in developing countries. Even in very poor countries, it was found that each dollar spent has at least a \$30 payoff.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

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