



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

A photograph of a female teacher in a colorful patterned sari and a young girl in a yellow dress standing in a classroom. They are both looking at a chalkboard. The girl is pointing at the board with her hands, and the teacher is looking on attentively. The chalkboard has some writing on it, including the words "my mother is".

# “Better Life, Better Future”

UNESCO Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education



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## A global partnership for girls' and women's education

“Better Life, Better Future”, UNESCO’s global partnership for girls’ and women’s education, addresses two main areas requiring increased attention – secondary education and adult literacy. It will seek to introduce programmes aimed at stemming the dropout of adolescent girls in the transition from primary to secondary education and in lower secondary schools, as well as focus on scaling up women’s literacy programmes through stronger advocacy and partnerships. As a first step, and in complement to other United Nations initiatives, UNESCO has recently concluded several dynamic public and private partnerships, which stand to benefit marginalized girls and women in Africa and Asia.

## A global conscience for gender equality

In parallel with this partnership, UNESCO is establishing a High-Level Panel on Girls’ and Women’s Education for Empowerment and Gender Equality in order to step up global advocacy. Including leading defenders of gender equality from government, multilateral organizations, civil society and the private sector, it will act as a global conscience for the advancement of girls and women.

## Why this new partnership?

➤ Because girls face a distinctive set of barriers to learning.

These range from early marriage and teen pregnancy which force many girls out of the education system, to lack of inclusive curricula with a gender perspective and gender-based violence in and around school. Targeted measures are needed to get girls to school and keep them there.

➤ Because newly literate women have a highly positive impact on all development indicators, from health to wealth. Women's literacy benefits not only women themselves, but also their children and the wider community.

**UNESCO's new partnerships** have been established to find collaborative solutions to the most fundamental challenges concerning the education of adolescent girls and women.

- 39 million girls of lower secondary age are currently not enrolled in either primary or secondary education, or 26% of the 11-15 age group.
- Only about one third of countries have achieved gender parity at the secondary level. In some instances, the dropout rate of girls from school has increased in the past decade.
- Adolescents who fall behind, due to late entry into primary school or grade repetition (or both), are at a significant risk of dropping out of school.
- Many girls of primary school age are excluded from education because they never had a chance to enter primary education at all.
- Lack of education for girls translates into the disproportionate number of adult women without literacy skills.
- Two-thirds of the world's 796 million illiterate adults are women.
- It has been estimated that universal secondary education for girls in sub-Saharan Africa could save as many as 1.8 million lives annually.



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**To invest in women and girls is, quite simply, to invest in a better future.**



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## **Lifetime Benefits**

- Education helps improve maternal health: in Burkina Faso, women with secondary education are twice as likely to give birth in health facilities as those with no education.
- An extra year of female schooling reduces fertility rates by 10%. In Mali, women with secondary education or above have an average of three children, while those with no education have an average of seven.
- In Latin America, children whose mothers have some secondary schooling remain in school for two to three more years than those of mothers with less schooling.
- Each extra year of a woman's schooling reduces the probability of infant mortality by 5% to 10%.
- A child raised by a woman who can read is 50% more likely to survive beyond age five.
- Women with post-primary education are five times more likely than illiterate women to be educated about HIV and AIDS.



## UNESCO empowering girls and women through education projects

In **Niger**, the empowerment of girls and women was the focus of a recently completed multi-donor funds-in-trust project, financed by the Governments of Andorra, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Monaco and San Marino. The project aimed to fight poverty through education and promote human rights by reinforcing the capacities of girls and women. Since 2006, around 2,000 people from several villages, a majority of which are girls and women, benefited from the project through new or rehabilitated classrooms that led to higher enrolment; vocational training for girls and literacy programmes and income-generating activities for village women.



© Malawi, COWFA 2010

In **Malawi**, the Coalition of Women Farmers was awarded the 2010 Honourable Mention of the UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy for its ground-breaking work in changing land ownership and power relations through literacy classes and discussion groups.



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Aseel, Alshaar and Noor, three 14-year-old girls from the West Bank (**Palestinian Authority**) won a special award in applied electronics at the 2010 Intel International Science and Engineering Fair in California. As students in the UNESCO/ UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) education system, they designed a prototype walking stick for blind people that beeps when it detects holes and other surface changes. In a field where girls are traditionally underrepresented, they competed against 1,500 finalists. The girls met UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who was “impressed by the brilliant idea” and highlighted the importance of the empowerment of young women.

Through the Programme for Enhancement of Literacy in **Afghanistan** (ELA) financed by the Government of Japan and implemented by UNESCO and Afghan authorities, some 90,000 youth and adults – 60% women – have completed a nine-month literacy course that also includes a strong human rights and vocational skills component. Today, some 100,000 learners are

enrolled in some 4,000 literacy classes across 18 provinces.



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In **Pakistan**, UNESCO launched a pilot mobile-based post-literacy Programme with the Bunyad Foundation and mobile phone company Mobilink. Fifty centres were established where 1,250 illiterate women acquired basic literacy skills. Semi-literate adolescent girls were given mobiles to receive text messages in Urdu for four months containing fun, pedagogically-adapted topics. The girls read the messages, copied them into workbooks and created and sent messages in return. As a result, their literacy skills improved and their confidence was boosted.

In **Mexico**, UNESCO is working with other agencies on a model approach to prevent gender violence against indigenous women. UNESCO's contribution has been to promote the concept of non-violent gender identities in young people from indigenous communities in the States of Oaxaca and Chiapas through capacity development for teachers and use of community radio.

## Private Sector Partnerships

**UNESCO has established a series of new partnerships with private partners to boost the education of girls and women, with a specific focus on Africa.**

**GEMS Education:** Gender-sensitive teacher training programmes are to be carried out in Lesotho and the People's Democratic Republic of Laos in the context of a project to improve the teaching of mathematics, science and technology. The project aims to reinforce the role of school leadership in promoting the participation of girls and women in these subjects. Funding amounts to US\$1 million over four years.

**Nokia:** This partnership, amounting to some US\$6 million over three years, promotes the use of mobile phones in post-literacy programmes, including the design and production of appropriate learning materials, in-service teacher training, and support to local school management. Policy research on mobile learning and pilot tests on the use of mobiles are envisaged in 2011, targeting teachers in underserved areas.

**Procter and Gamble:** Developing literacy and life-skills programmes for marginalized girls and women in Senegal is the thrust of this project, which aims to provide literacy to around 40,000 girls and women through the use of

ICTs. It also aims to empower young women through income-generating activities. Funding amounts to some US\$750,000 over two years.

**Packard Foundation:** Discussions are in the final stages for the approval of a three-year project of some US\$1.5 million, aimed at addressing girls' dropout in lower secondary education in Ethiopia and Tanzania.

**Microsoft:** a new agreement will be signed covering the integration of ICT in teacher training and the use of mobile technologies for education, including through community access, with a focus on girls and women.

“There is no justification – be it cultural, economic or social – for denying girls and women an education. It is a basic right and an absolute condition for reaching all the internationally agreed development goals. It is through education that girls and women can gain the freedom to make choices, to shape their future and to build more inclusive and just societies.”

Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO



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