

Key Messages and Data on Girls' and Women's Education and Literacy

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Discrimination against Girls and Women Exists at All Educational Levels:

An estimated 35 million girls of primary school age and 37 million girls of lower secondary school age were not enrolled in school in 2009.¹

The extent to which girls are disproportionately excluded from education is higher at the secondary level than in primary education and increases further from the lower to the upper secondary levels.²

In the Central African Republic, Niger, Chad and Malawi, fewer than 1 in 200 girls go to university.³

Illiteracy has a Woman's Face:

Almost two-thirds of the world's 792 million illiterate adults are women.⁴

The overall proportion of adult female literates in 2009 remains well below what the rate was for men in 1990.⁵

In Yemen, women living in urban areas are almost three times as likely to be literate as women living in rural areas.⁶

In Bolivia, 30% of adult women cannot read and write, compared to just 5% of men.⁷

Only 40% of Pakistani women over the age of 15 can read and write, compared to 70% of men.⁸

In Tanzania, one third of women – more than 4 million women in total – are not literate.⁹

¹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics. <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/gender-education.aspx>

² UNESCO. 2012. p. 58

³ GCE. 2012. p. 6

⁴ UNESCO. 2011a. p. 12

⁵ UNESCO. 2012. p. 94

⁶ UNESCO. 2011b. p. 67

⁷ GCE. 2012. p. 5

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17

Girls' enrolment in primary education has been increasing at a faster rate than that of boys.¹⁰ This has helped to close the gender gap, but poverty accentuates the gender divide, even at the primary level:

In 47 out of 54 African countries, girls have less than a 50% chance of completing primary school.¹¹

Poor girls living in rural areas are sixteen times less likely to be in school than boys from the wealthiest households living in urban areas.¹²

While gaps in school attendance between wealthy girls and boys are often small, girls from households that are poor, rural or from an ethnic minority are typically left far behind.¹³

Opportunities Narrow as Education Levels Rise:

In sub-Saharan Africa, the gender gap widens significantly at the secondary level, where around six girls are enrolled for every ten boys.¹⁴

Only around one third of secondary school teachers in South and West Asia are female and fewer than three in 10 in sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁵

In Guinea, only 26% of girls enrolled in the last grade of primary education actually enter secondary education compared to 34% of boys.¹⁶

In Tanzania, only 32% of the girls who complete primary school make the transition to lower secondary.¹⁷

In Bangladesh, the secondary completion rate for boys is 23% compared with 15% for girls.¹⁸

Secondary schooling is far more costly, often forcing households to ration resources among children. Where girls' education is less valued, or perceived as generating lower returns, parents may favour sons over daughters.¹⁹

Parents may worry more about the security of adolescent girls because secondary schools are often further from home than primary schools.²⁰

Enrolment rates in secondary school are nearly one-third lower in conflict-affected countries compared with other developing countries, and far lower still for girls.²¹

¹⁰ UNESCO. 2012. p. 32

¹¹ GCE. 2012. p. 6

¹² UNESCO. 2011b. p. 43

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 8

¹⁴ UNESCO. 2011b. p. 152

¹⁵ GCE. 2012. p. 7

¹⁶ UNESCO Institute of Statistics. 2010. p. 40

¹⁷ GCE. 2012. p. 6

¹⁸ UNESCO. 2011b. p. 8

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 76

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) – Stereotypes Prevail

Where TVET courses are specifically offered for women, this is typically limited to traditional female tasks in the garment, food, health and service sectors.²²

Technical and vocational training courses often channel girls into areas characterized by low skills and low pay.²³

Even in countries where gender equality is advanced, women can encounter resistance against their inclusion in technical fields within TVET.²⁴

In 2008, females made up 31% of technical and vocational enrolment in South and West Asia and 40% in sub-Saharan Africa.²⁵

Now the Good News! Benefits of Educating Girls and Women

The education of girls and women can lead to a wide range of benefits – from improved maternal health, reduced infant mortality and fertility rates to increased prevention against HIV and AIDS.²⁶

More educated mothers are more likely to know that HIV can be transmitted by breastfeeding, and that the risk of mother-to-child transmission can be reduced by taking drugs during pregnancy.²⁷

In Malawi, 60% of mothers with secondary education or higher were aware that treatment could reduce HIV transmission risks, compared with 27% of women with no education.²⁸

An extra year of female schooling reduces fertility rates by 10%, according to the World Bank.²⁹

In Mali, women with secondary or higher level of education have an average of 3 children, while those with no education have an average of 7 children.³⁰

In Burkina Faso, mothers with secondary education are twice as likely to give birth in health facilities as those with no education.³¹

Each extra year of a mother's schooling reduces the probability of infant mortality by 5% to 10%.³²

²¹ UNESCO. 2011b. p. 15

²² UNESCO-UNEVOC. 2011. p. 7

²³ UNESCO. 2011b. p. 81

²⁴ UNESCO-UNEVOC. 2011. p. 7

²⁵ UNESCO. 2011b. p. 81

²⁶ UNESCO. 2012. p. 1

²⁷ UNESCO. 2011b. p. 36

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1

²⁹ UNESCO. 2011a. p. 14

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21

³² *Ibid.*, p. 17

Children of mothers with secondary education or higher are twice as likely to survive beyond age 5 compared to those whose mothers have no education.³³

Improvements in women's education explained half of the reduction in child deaths between 1990 and 2009.³⁴

A child born to a mother who can read is 50% more likely to survive past age 5.³⁵

In sub-Saharan Africa, an estimated 1.8 million children's lives could have been saved in 2008 if their mothers had at least a secondary education.³⁶

In Indonesia, 68% of children with mothers who have attended secondary school are immunized, compared with 19% of children whose mothers have no primary schooling.³⁷

In Latin America, children whose mothers have some secondary schooling remain in school for two to three more years than children of mothers with less schooling, according to the Inter-American Development Bank.³⁸

Wages, agricultural income and productivity – all critical for reducing poverty – are higher where women involved in agriculture receive a better education.³⁹

Each additional year of schooling beyond primary offers greater payoffs for improved opportunities, options and outcomes for girls and women.⁴⁰

³³ UNESCO. 2011a. p. 16

³⁴ Gakidou, E. *et al.* 2010. "Increased educational attainment and its effect on child mortality in 175 countries between 1970 and 2009: a systematic analysis". *The Lancet*. Vol. 376, No. 9745. pp. 959–74, cited in: UNESCO. 2011b. p. 35

³⁵ UNESCO. 2011a. p. 17

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18

³⁷ UNESCO. 2011b. p. 36

³⁸ UNESCO. 2011a. p. 15

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12

⁴⁰ International Centre for Research on Women. 2005. p. 2

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