

# Education

## 62 million girls are not in primary school

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### 1. Introduction: why girls' education?

#### Convention on the Rights of the Child

##### Article 28

1. States Parties recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

- (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
- (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need

##### Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

##### Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential

##### Article 34

States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

#### Millennium Development Goals

##### Goal 2

Achieve universal primary education  
Target: Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling

*"Me and other girls of the community school want to make our future bright. I do not want to see my brothers and sisters experiencing the same hardships that I faced. I have developed confidence in myself. All this has happened due to education. After seeing us, people of our village have become aware about the importance of education. Now those people who were against the education of girls are sending their daughters and sisters to the schools."*

**Nagina Habib**, Community School, Lassan Thakral, Pakistan.<sup>1</sup>

*"School is a good thing. If you go to school, you will become a female teacher, a minister. However many parents say that it*

*is not good to send girls to school... I have many things to do when I come back home even if I am tired. I sweep the floor, I go to buy things for my mother, and I play with my brother. I do not have much time to do my homework."*

**Balovi Eliane**, aged 10, Couffo District, Benin.<sup>2</sup>

At 72, Mandisina Mawere's girlhood days are long over. But she has made herself a promise: that the girls in her family will have an education. She knows that education is the key to so many other rights for women: "As a young girl, I wasn't allowed to go to school," she said. "Since then I have vowed I would never deprive my daughters of an education and now I am doing the same for my granddaughters."<sup>3</sup>

Mandisina is putting her words into action. She is part of a garden project in Zimbabwe raising money for school fees for children who cannot afford them. She may not have been educated, but she knows just how much she has missed by not going to school and is determined that things will be different for her own daughters and granddaughters.<sup>4</sup>

She is right to think that education makes a huge difference. A host of academic studies, national and international initiatives and projects on the ground have proved the case for girls' education. The education of girls has a significant impact on other areas of a woman's life. Her children are more likely to be healthy and to go to school themselves. For example, children with unschooled mothers are 4.8 times more likely to be out of primary school in Venezuela, 4.4 times more likely in Suriname, and 3.4 times more likely in Guyana. Data shows a striking correlation between under-five mortality rates and the educational level attained by a child's mother, not to mention maternal mortality rates. An educated woman also has a better chance of earning an income herself, which has a positive effect on her family, and therefore on society as a whole. One study in Kenya estimated that crop yields could rise up to 22 per cent if women farmers enjoyed the same education and decision-making authority as men.<sup>5</sup> The whole country

benefits if a girl is educated: studies have shown that as a country's primary enrolment rate for girls increases, so too does its gross domestic product per capita.<sup>6</sup> Not only does a girl's education have an exponential impact on society, education helps the girl for her own sake. It helps her to protect herself from AIDS, exploitation and hazardous child labour. And education is not just a privilege: it is every girl's right.

Kofi Annan, the former United Nations Secretary General, said: "There is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls. If we are to succeed in our efforts to build a more healthy, peaceful and equitable world, the classrooms of the world have to be full of girls as well as boys."<sup>7</sup> The case is clear: so what is being done?

*The World Education Forum has promised to achieve gender equality in education by 2015.*



VALARIE BURTON

### Children's views

A study for Plan in Pakistan asked children what they thought was important and girls' education came high on the list.<sup>8</sup>

Girls thought that:

- "Parents should be told of the importance of education so that they can have a greater understanding"
- "Girls should be given higher education and they should be loved as much as boys are by their parents. They don't send the girls to school but instead make them do all the housework"
- "Women are confined within the house. There is no life without education. If we study we can do something, if nothing else we can teach our own kids"

Boys too thought girls' education was important:

- "Some people don't let women study; it is their right to study"
- "Every village in Mansehra should have a school so girls and boys can study and have better interaction"
- "Some people think that it's not important for women to be educated, but I think they should be educated. The Holy Qur'an says that it is essential for every man and woman to be educated"

### Promises and commitments

Recognising the importance of girls' education and the fact that it is a right, the world has made a number of commitments to its promotion over the past two decades. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which came into force in September 1990, says that: "State Parties recognise the right of every child to education, and with a view to achieving the right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity."

The World Conference on Education for All in the same year stressed the importance of girls' education in particular. In 1999, major

non-governmental organisations and teachers and their unions from 150 countries founded the Global Campaign for Education to demand universal education.<sup>9</sup>

Ten years after the CRC came into effect, in 2000, at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, governments promised to:

- Ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
- Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieve gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to, and achievement in, basic education of good quality.<sup>10</sup>

This was built on later in the year by the adoption of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which put both gender and education as high priorities. Goal two is to "achieve universal primary education". Goal 3 includes a commitment to "eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015."<sup>11</sup>

There can be no doubt that these combined efforts have borne fruit. Globally, there have been many improvements in education over the last five to ten years. By 2004, 87 out of every 100 children of primary age were enrolled in school. Girls' enrolment has

	Literacy rate of 15-24 year olds, percentage <sup>13</sup>		
	Total	Men	Women
World	87.2	90.4	84.0
Developing Regions	85.0	88.7	81.1
Northern Africa	84.3	89.9	78.4
Sub-Saharan Africa	73.1	78.1	68.4
Latin America and the Caribbean	96.0	95.6	96.4
Eastern Asia	98.9	99.2	98.5
Southern Asia	72.2	80.3	63.3
South-Eastern Asia	96.2	96.5	95.9
Western Asia	91.3	94.9	87.6
Oceania	72.8	74.9	70.5

UN Millennium Development Goals Indicators, 2006



increased faster than boys' in many countries. The numbers of literate young women are also increasing as a result. In 1990, 80.1 per cent of women aged between 15 and 24 were literate as opposed to 88.2 per cent of men, and in the period from 2000 to 2004 it had risen to 84.0 per cent of women and 90.4 per cent of men.<sup>12</sup> There are more female teachers than ever before. These changes are all to be welcomed.

### Missed goals

However, some of the Millennium Development Goals that relate to girls' education have not been achieved. The UN Secretary General, in his 2006 report, notes that: "the goal for gender parity [in the case of schools, equal numbers of girls and boys] by 2005, has been missed." In 2004, of 181 countries for which data exists, only two-thirds had reached gender parity at primary level, one third at secondary level (out of 177 countries) and only five countries out of 148 with data had reached gender parity at tertiary level.<sup>14</sup>

The good news is that recent progress in enrolments at primary level has benefited girls in particular, with the global Gender Parity Index for primary education improving from 0.92 in 1999 to 0.94 in 2004.<sup>15</sup> Disparities

#### Countries with the lowest Gender Parity Index<sup>17</sup> at primary level (years range from 1998 to 2002)<sup>18</sup>

Afghanistan	0.60
Yemen	0.60
Chad	0.67
Niger	0.68
Burkina Faso	0.71
Guinea-Bissau	0.71
Mali	0.72
Côte d'Ivoire	0.73
Benin	0.77
Djibouti	0.77
Guinea	0.78
Liberia	0.78
Pakistan	0.79

UNICEF. April 2005. "Progress for Children, A report card on gender parity and primary education," Number 2.

do remain and are now concentrated in Arab states, South and West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Women make up almost two-thirds – sixty-four per cent – of the world's adult illiterates.<sup>16</sup> There is still a long way to go.

Once girls do get to school, the problems do not end. In addition, the quality of the education they receive is often low, with large classrooms and few resources. There are not enough female teachers to give girls support and to act as role models. Not surprisingly, girls are more likely than boys to drop out after a few years.

#### Afghanistan – education for all or a distant dream?

**Under Taliban rule, education in Afghanistan was at an all-time low. Girls were not allowed to attend school at all and as a result literacy rates were among the lowest in the world. With the Taliban gone, children started returning to school. By December 2005, 5.1 million children were back in school, including 1.5 million girls.**

**But today, schools are closing and students are staying at home. In the four southern provinces more than 100,000 children are shut out of school. They are no longer safe places. As of July 2006, the UNICEF School Incident Database counted 99 cases of attacks against schools, including a missile attack, 11 explosions, 50 school burnings and 37 threats against schools and communities.<sup>19</sup>**

**Shugofa Sahar, a 12-year-old student at the Aysha-e-Durani High School for Girls, said: "All the girls and boys from Afghanistan should go to school in order to rebuild and develop our country".<sup>20</sup>**

**But in today's Afghanistan, this is becoming an increasingly distant dream.**

In other countries, the picture is more hopeful. Social Watch Philippines reported that the Philippines is one of the few developing countries which has achieved basic parity between girls and boys in school access, retention and achievement in both rural and urban areas.<sup>21</sup>

During the 1990s, girls out-performed boys in gross and net primary enrolment rates, cohort survival to grade 6, repetition and dropout rates and in learning achievement.

In eight countries in Latin America, Plan and its local partners have reached 100,000 girls since the year 2000 with a girls' education program. Methods used to increase their school attendance, completion and performance included the construction of separate latrines, the recruitment of female teachers to reduce sexual intimidation and an increase in girls' participation in school councils. Stereotypes were removed from textbooks. An evaluation of this model in Guatemala showed that girls wanted to continue to study and were less inclined to get married at an early age.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. Primary education

There were an estimated 115 million primary age children who did not go to school in 2001.<sup>23</sup> Sixty-two million of the children out of school are girls.<sup>24</sup> That is more than all the girls in North America and Europe. Some have never attended school at all; others have had to drop out. The 2005 UN Millennium Development Goals report notes that: "In all developing regions, except Latin America and the Caribbean and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, girls are less likely than boys to remain in school. The gap between girls

#### Primary children out of school (2004, millions)<sup>27</sup>

	Boys	Girls
Sub-Saharan Africa	22.4	24.4
South Asia	19.1	23.7
East Asia/Pacific	4.1	3.9
Middle East/North Africa	4.4	5.3
Latin America/Caribbean	1.9	2.2
Central and Eastern Europe, CIS	1.4	1.4
Industrialized countries	1.5	1.5
Developing countries	21.4	23.6
<b>World total</b>	<b>54.8</b>	<b>62.2</b>

UNESCO Institute for Statistics. 2005. "Children out of school: measuring exclusion from primary education." Montreal. p 17



MARK READ

and boys is greatest in the 22 countries where fewer than 60 per cent of children complete their primary education."<sup>25</sup>

There are a number of initiatives that aim to address this problem. At regional level, the African Girls' Education Initiative, which was a partnership started in 1994 between African countries, donor governments and the United Nations, has led to increased access to school for both girls and boys. Between 1997 and 2001, gross primary enrolment ratios for girls rose by 15 per cent in Guinea, 12 per cent in Senegal and nine per cent in Benin.<sup>26,27</sup> In Chad, the number of girls enrolled increased four-fold over two years; the drop-out rate fell from 22 per cent to nine per cent and the number of female teachers increased from 36 to 787.<sup>28</sup>

## 3. Secondary education

In addition to the numbers at primary level, there are probably another 100 to 150 million older children who do not go to secondary school. At secondary level, in many countries, girls are even less likely than boys to go to school. They are married, or kept at home to

*School access for girls has risen in many African countries.*

do the household chores, or sent out to work. The gender gap at secondary school is greatest in South Asia and the Middle East/North Africa. In South Asia, 54 per cent of boys are in secondary school but only 48 per cent of girls, and in the Middle East/North Africa, the figures are 50 and 44 per cent.<sup>29</sup>

In Latin America, however, there are more girls than boys attending school at secondary level, as disaffected boys drop out.

Steps are being taken to address these problems. In Kenya, Maendeleo ya Wanawake initiated a 'Girl Child Education Project' in slums in Nairobi.<sup>32</sup> The project built informal schools where girls attend school and learn life skills. These schools are built close to the girls' homes. In places where food resources are scarce for many poor families, the organisation has initiated a lunch programme for girls to reduce the need for them to sell sex in exchange for food.

In Brazil, where one percent of GDP is spent on an old age pension of \$70 a month, the pension is associated with increased school enrolment, particularly of girls aged 12-14 years. Alongside this is a national programme – Bolsa Familia – which aims to address high drop-out rates by targeting income subsidies to families with school-age children on the condition that each child attends school at least 90% of the time. Cash transfers are

paid directly to mothers. Studies show sharp reductions in school drop-out rates and higher enrolments in post-primary education.<sup>33</sup>

### Community school: new opportunities

*“Girls of our village had no opportunity to get education after Middle (grade 8). Girls’ education was not given importance. People having resources would admit their girls in private schools, but poor people could not do so. Since there is no government secondary school for girls in our village, hence a great number of girls could not get education after Middle. From the time community school became functional in our village all the girls belonging to poor families have started getting education. I myself have taken admission in 9th grade after waiting for four years having passed grade 8. As I had no resources therefore I had to stay at home for so many years... Twenty girls of this village would not have been studying in grade 10, if we had not got community school.”*

**Shazia Riaz**, student class IX, Community-managed school, Lissan Thakral, District Mansehra, Pakistan.<sup>34</sup>

### Boys doing badly

In most countries, as we have seen, it is girls who are not attending school. But in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is boys, particularly from poor families, who are more

#### Secondary net attendance ratios,<sup>30</sup> selected countries (1996-2005)<sup>31</sup>

	Girls	Boys
Yemen	32.4	78.2
Guinea	23.8	48.6
Côte d'Ivoire	28.5	48.8
Mozambique	31.7	54.0
Benin	35.2	58.6
Mali	22.4	36.2
Niger	10.6	16.9
Senegal	23.6	36.2
Chad	36.6	56.0
Iraq	40.3	60.1

UNICEF, The State of the World's Children, 2007

#### Girls' average reading score

	Girls' average reading score	Boys' average reading score
Finland	573	522
France	517	488
Greece	492	454
Italy	506	471
Austria	516	482
UK	539	511
Ireland	542	513

Claire, H. (Ed.) (2005). Gender in education 3-19 - A fresh approach. London: Association of Teachers and Lecturers.



PLAN / MAY EVERS

The status of women is a major factor in deciding whether girls, like these young Malawians, get secondary education.

likely to drop out of school. A study conducted in Chile found that poor boys are four times more likely to enter the workforce than poor girls. In Brazil, child labour has robbed boys of an education by luring them away from books with promises of money.<sup>35</sup>

In many industrialised countries, while there is gender parity in terms of attendance, girls are outperforming boys in schools. It is no longer seen as 'cool' to work hard, and so boys are falling behind girls in examinations.

A table of gender differences in selected European countries shows a marked gap between the reading levels of girls and boys.<sup>36</sup>

## 4. The reasons why

So why don't children, and particularly girls, go to school, despite the fact that it is their right to do so? And why do more girls than boys drop out after a few years in poorer countries? There are a number of reasons, most of which are interlinked. The social position of women in society, poverty, social class and caste, and early marriage

are all contributory factors. Then there are those that relate to the overall quality and accessibility of the education provided.

### Women's status

Women's status in society is one major factor. "The extent of illiteracy in a nation is a measure of that nation's degree of attachment to social justice" says one Asian commentator, Manzoor Ahmed.<sup>37</sup> In many countries, a woman's place is still seen as being in the home, and therefore a girl's education is seen as less important than her brother's. There are also relatively few women with decision-making positions in government or elsewhere to push an alternative view.

And these beliefs are hard to shift. Results from a World Values Survey<sup>38</sup> revealed that almost two-thirds of male respondents in Bangladesh indicated that university education for boys should be prioritised over that of girls – an opinion echoed by around one-third or more of male respondents in Iran, Uganda and Mexico and by 1 in 10 men in China and just under 1 in 13 in the United States.<sup>39</sup> Without

an education, women too often hold the same beliefs that men are somehow intrinsically superior.

There is an old Bengali saying: “Caring for a daughter is like watering another’s tree”. It reflects the belief that a daughter will be lost to the family through marriage, and that it is therefore not prudent to invest in a daughter in the same way as a son, who will support his parents in their old age.<sup>40</sup>

Taklitin Walet Farati, a non-governmental organisation worker in Mali, visits girls’ homes and tries to persuade their parents to send them to school: “I’d go and check why girls weren’t attending school, to be told by their mothers: ‘We can’t let our daughters go to school. We need them in the home. They are our hands and feet!’”<sup>41</sup>

### Poverty and working children

A second reason why girls fail to attend school is because they come from poor families. Faced with the choice between sending a son to school or a daughter, parents will almost always choose the son. A survey in Pakistan showed that girls’ enrolment in schools increases with a rise in family income. Household survey data from all developing regions show that children from the poorest 20 per cent of households are 3.2 times more likely to be out of primary school than those from the wealthiest 20 per cent.<sup>42</sup>

Even when education is ostensibly free, there are often a number of hidden costs such as transport, school uniforms or books that mean a family cannot afford to educate its children. A girl may be kept at home to look after younger siblings and run the household while her parents work to earn a living and her brothers go to school. Or she may be kept out of school in order to work and contribute to the family income. There are 211 million children between five and 14 years old who are working, mostly in agriculture. That is 18 per cent of the world’s children in this age group.<sup>43</sup>

Girls like Sylvia in Tanzania, who worked as a domestic servant. This report comes from Anti-Slavery International: “Despite only being



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a young teenager, she worked long hours cooking, cleaning and doing the majority of household chores. She was made to sleep on the floor, was only given leftovers to eat and was not paid for her labour. When one of the men in the household severely beat her for refusing his sexual advances, she fled. A neighbour referred her to the local organisation Kivulini which provided her with safe shelter and compensation from her ‘employer’.<sup>44</sup>

In order to address this problem in Bangladesh, the government introduced the Female Stipend Programme in 1994. This is aimed at girls in classes 6-10 who are offered a small allowance, free tuition, a book allowance, and payment for their exams. For this, they must show 75 per cent attendance, obtain a minimum of 45 per cent in their exams and remain unmarried until they have completed their Secondary Certificate of Education in Year 10. The programme has increased girls’ enrolment at secondary level, with numbers peaking at 4 million in 2001 when criteria for the stipend were tightened up. It helped Bangladesh achieve gender parity by 2000.

### Abigail’s story: teaching a girl is a beautiful thing

Abigail is just one of 750,000 Zambian children who have been orphaned by AIDS. Many of these children – particularly girls – are robbed of the chance of an education because of poverty.

Making time for homework in Cambodia.

When Abigail’s parents died of AIDS, she was forced to drop out of school. She went to live with her elderly grandmother in rural Zambia, who struggled to support her orphaned granddaughter. Yet educating girls is the single most effective weapon against HIV and AIDS in Zambia, where the life expectancy for girls like Abigail is just 33.

With the help of CAMFED (The Campaign for Female Education), Abigail was able to return to school. For every year of education she receives beyond primary school, Abigail’s future income will increase by 15 per cent and her vulnerability to AIDS will drop significantly.

Today, 18-year-old Abigail is about to finish her final exams. Today, she dreams of becoming a journalist or an accountant. “When I start working, I want to help other orphaned children and put them through school. Teaching a girl is a very beautiful thing.”<sup>45</sup>

backward communities... have been totally bypassed by educational and other services,” says one UNESCO report.<sup>46</sup>

### The plight of Phulmani, the ‘mouse-eater’

Phulmani is eight years old. She stays with her family in a village called Amardaha, in south-eastern Nepal. She belongs to the community of *rishidevs* (the mice eaters). Her family is considered ‘untouchable’ and they live as landless squatters. Phulmani has been enrolled in the school, through the efforts of a development organisation in the area, but does not attend, as her parents cannot give money for the school books she needs. Her mother does not think that it is important for her daughter to study. She still wants more sons.

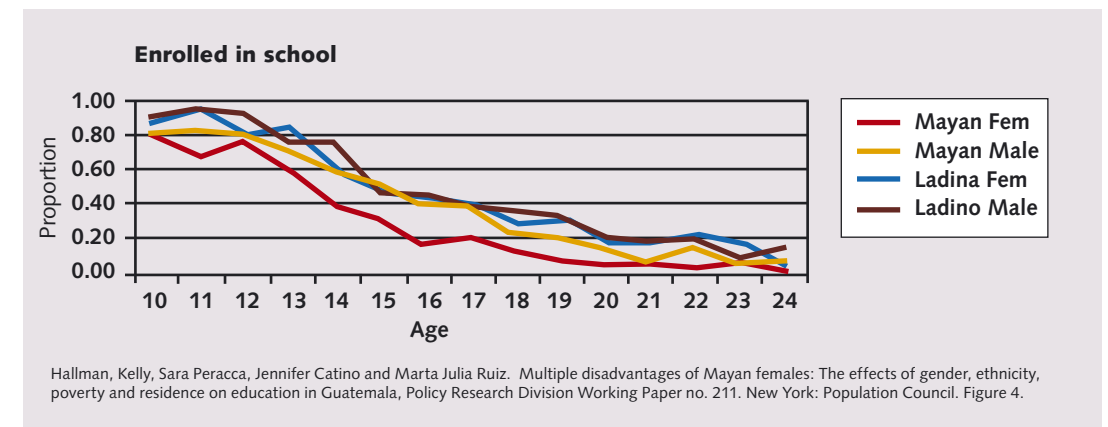
She says her husband is happy that she has produced a son after three daughters. Phulmani’s eldest sister Bairi is married. She is 18 years old and has a two-and-a-half-year old son. She encourages Phulmani to study and wishes that she too had had the chance.<sup>47</sup>

## 5. Girls from particular groups

### Girls from minority groups

Girls from lower classes or castes, who are also more likely to be poor, often lose out the most. For example, in India, girls from higher social and economic classes record better achievement than boys in poorer communities. “Women from landless households, among them those from social and economically

Girls from indigenous and other minority groups are another sector who are less likely to go to school than their peers. For example, in Serbia and Montenegro, the dropout rate for Roma girls is reported to be up to 80 per cent higher than for boys.<sup>48</sup> In Guatemala, one study showed how Mayan girls were the least likely to go to school, followed by Mayan boys.<sup>49</sup>





## Children with disabilities

Children with disabilities often do not benefit from education, though they are as entitled to it as any other child. It is estimated that around 40 million of the 115 million currently out of school are children with disabilities.<sup>50</sup> Again, parents keep girls in particular at home – as in Bangladesh where parents fear stigmatisation and sexual abuse – or send them to institutions, rather than have them face the difficulties and prejudices of the outside world.<sup>51</sup>

### Nodira's wish

Nodira is one of five children. Her name means 'unique' in Uzbek. Her family is poor and she has never been to school because it is too far to go in a wheelchair. She had a tutor for a while but then the family moved house.

Every morning, after reciting her prayers, Nodira feeds the hens and goats from her wheelchair. The rest of her day is spent knitting for other people and helping her mother with the household chores. She also tries to study and still has a dream of going to university, although in fact it is unlikely that she will even finish primary education.

Her greatest wish is simple: she wants a friend. "What I want more than anything is a friend who also has a disability," she says. "Somebody to talk to that will not feel sorry for me or make fun of me, somebody who will understand what my life is like."<sup>52</sup>

There are many projects that aim to get girls and boys with disabilities into school. In 1996, China launched a national plan on inclusive education for children with disabilities which included a project known as the Golden Key. Golden Key has helped people like Lan Rue, a visually impaired 10-year-old girl who is one of nearly 2,000 who have been integrated into mainstream schools. Each child is allocated a personal instructor, Braille books, writing boards and cassette recorders.<sup>53</sup> The Golden Key Research Centre of Education for the Visually

Impaired in Beijing continues to provide services to the visually impaired throughout China.<sup>54</sup>

### Ten messages for teachers about children with disabilities

1. Prevent stereotypes and negative attitudes about children with disabilities by avoiding negative words.
2. Depict children with disabilities with equal status as those without disabilities.
3. Allow children with disabilities to speak for themselves and express their thoughts and feelings.
4. Observe children and identify disabilities. The earlier a disability is detected in a child, the more effective the intervention and the less severe the disability.
5. Refer the child whose disability is identified for developmental screening and early intervention.
6. Adapt the lessons, learning materials and classroom to the needs of children with disabilities.
7. Sensitise parents, families and caregivers about the special needs of children with disabilities.
8. Teach frustrated parents simple ways to deal with and manage their child's needs.
9. Guide siblings and other family members in lessening the pain and frustration of parents of children with disabilities.
10. Actively involve parents of young children with disabilities as full members in planning school and after school activities.<sup>55</sup>

## 6. Inside school

### Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:  
(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and

physical abilities to their fullest potential;  
(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Even once they have arrived at school, girls face problems that may be the cause of high drop out rates. The situation is often worse in rural areas than in urban ones: for example, a study in India found that 41.3 per cent of rural girls in the 10-14 age group dropped out of school, compared to 16.6 per cent in urban areas<sup>56</sup>.

**First** is the fact that there are still relatively few female teachers, although this varies considerably from country to country and numbers are rising. In Sub-Saharan Africa, fewer than one in four teachers is a woman.<sup>57</sup> In Latin America and the Caribbean, however, women account for 80 per cent of teachers. Countries that have a high enrolment at primary level tend to employ a higher number of female teachers.<sup>58</sup> A study from Pakistan notes: "Rural parents find the presence of female teachers reassuring. Moreover, a female teacher, a career woman, often acts as a role model and helps dispel gender stereotype attitudes in girls and their families." In Kenya, the Strengthening Primary School Management Project boosted the number of female head-teachers from 10 to 23 per cent over a ten-year period by requiring that one out of two head-teachers being trained was a woman. Female primary school teachers now account for 41 per cent of the total.

**Second**, girls, particularly after puberty, may not feel safe at school. They may face sexual harassment and physical abuse from teachers and peers, both in school itself and on the journey home. Carolina from Honduras explains that "teachers use violence because they think it is the only way to keep control."<sup>59</sup> According to the World Health Organisation: "For many young women, the most common place where sexual coercion and harassment are experienced is in school."<sup>60</sup> In South Africa, 32 per cent of reported child rapes were carried out by a teacher.<sup>61</sup> Teachers promise better grades in return for sexual favours. An



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additional danger for girls in many countries may be the risk of being infected with HIV. In some countries there is a belief that HIV can be cured by sex with a young woman who is a virgin (see Chapter 4 – Health).

Girls may also face violence and sexual harassment when travelling to and from school; a 12-14 year old girl from the Kaqchikel community, one of the larger ethno-linguistic groups in Guatemala, reported that: "On the roads and on the street [we feel unsafe] because there are men there that tease/harass you and we don't like that."<sup>62</sup> Girls aged eight to 10 in a private school in Katmandu, Nepal, said: "As a punishment for not doing homework the teacher used to let them go if they agreed to kiss him on the cheek or he made them kiss a friend of the opposite sex. He made them sit on his lap if they asked him to return their notebooks."<sup>63</sup> Such harassment is not just in the developing world. Research from the US shows four out of five students – girls and boys – report that they have experienced some type of sexual harassment in school, despite a greater awareness of school policies dealing with the issue. The study showed that girls are more likely to report being negatively affected.<sup>64</sup>

There are a number of initiatives at government, school, teacher and pupil level to address the issue of sexual violence in school. One example from Nigeria is the Girls' Power Initiative (GPI), which promotes comprehensive sexuality education that has five overlapping

*The performance of girls is improved by female teachers and a girl friendly environment.*

aspects: human development, emotions and relationships, sexual health, sexual behaviour and sexual violence. The project believes: “there truly cannot be empowerment where there is no knowledge and control over that which is basically ours: our bodies.”<sup>65</sup> It is aimed mainly at girls aged 10-18 with some programmes also for boys, parents, teachers, health care providers and policy makers which aim to increase communication between them and girls on issues affecting the girl child. A young Nigerian woman said: “GPI weekly meetings... opened my eyes really wide. I began to take note and notice that girls were... being denied enjoyment of fundamental human rights all because of sex. I realised that women are being raped, cheated upon, pushed to the background, sexually harassed and battered by their so-called husbands and yet nobody says anything, nobody seems to notice because it has to do with females/women. Seeing all [this]... I took a step of courage, made up my mind and decided to be part of the struggle to let the world know that [women’s] rights are human rights.”<sup>66</sup>

Homophobic bullying and harassment are widespread. A European survey found that 58 per cent of young lesbians surveyed had been bullied in school and that the problem appeared to be on the rise.<sup>67</sup> Pupils who do not fit gender stereotypes – such as the ‘Sissy-boy’ or the ‘Tom-girl’ – are typical victims of bullying. One Portuguese girl was too young to understand what was happening to her when she was bullied: “A bunch of kids once stole my wallet and cut it to pieces, and all the stuff inside it, like ID, photos, etc because they thought I was gay. Funny thing is, I had no idea back then, I was 13 and a tomboy. They judged me on my appearance, because I dressed like a boy.”<sup>68</sup>

A 2005 report reveals that violence against young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students continues to be the rule, not the exception, in America’s schools.

- 75 per cent report being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation.
- 37.8 per cent report being physically harassed because of their sexual orientation.

- Only 16.5 per cent of students reported a teacher intervening when a homophobic remark was made.<sup>69</sup>

**Third**, there are very practical issues that may prevent girls going to school, especially once they reach puberty. Adequate and sex-segregated hygiene and sanitation facilities; a school that is within easy and safe reach of home, all contribute to more girls attending school – and their parents being happy about them doing so. The lack of access to water and sanitation both in school and in the wider community is a major factor influencing poor school attendance and learning. In the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, for example, UNICEF says: “More than a fifth of girls nationwide are not enrolled in school and in some areas the rate is more than 50 per cent. The issue is not just the lack of facilities in schools, but their absence in the wider community... In addition, the household chore of fetching water falls mainly to girls, who can spend as much as two hours a day on the activity... Even those who make it to school may be sent by their teachers to fetch water...”<sup>70</sup>

Napoga Gurigo, from Tengzuk village in Ghana, is around 12 years old. She gets up at 5am to fetch water for her family from the waterhole. On average it takes six hours to collect water as they have to wait for water to seep through the ground and the mud to settle. Animals also drink from the same waterhole. Napoga does not go to school; most of her time is spent undertaking household tasks. She lives with her future husband’s family.<sup>71</sup>

Last but certainly not least, there are issues about quality. It is not enough just to attend school; girls (and their parents) have to feel that what they are learning is useful and appropriate. Sometimes classes are so large and the curriculum seems so irrelevant that it does not seem worth the many sacrifices. In Bangladesh: “Gender bias in the education planning is reflected by the sex-role stereotypes presented in the text-books. Women and girls are presented as passive characters, while boys and men are presented in various active roles. In addition, the fact that the course content

and course design seldom reflect the realities of rural women’s life also acts as a deterrent. Lack of flexibility and neglect of addressing learner needs also act as a deterrent (particularly for rural girls).” How can education empower women, when they only learn about men?

“There is little point in giving a girl the opportunity to go to school if the quality of her education is so poor that she will not become literate and numerate or if she will not acquire skills needed for life. Improving the quality of education must be high on national agendas if girls are to go to school and stay in school,” says UNICEF.

Combining all the factors that keep girls in school can work as a strategy. In Senegal, a social mobilisation project for girls’ enrolment led by the Head of State was set up 1994. As a result, enrolment increased in the first year of primary education by 41.5 per cent in 1994 and by 53 per cent in 1996. Committees and mobile schools were set up throughout the country. The government established a watchdog on

gender in education that aimed to eradicate gender prejudice from schools and textbooks.

The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) created materials for education practitioners about issues affecting girls at school. It has produced best practice guides, ranging from protecting girls from HIV/AIDS via peer counselling in schools to providing recommendations regarding girls’ education in conflict situations.<sup>72</sup>

It is not just girls who benefit: all the changes that encourage girls to attend school can also make learning more possible for boys. A study by USAID in eight countries concluded that programmes and policies to improve girls’ education have also benefited boys. In a few countries, such as Brazil, girls are now doing better than boys and staying on longer in school. This is particularly true when they reach adolescence: at ages 15 to 17, 19.2 per cent of boys have dropped out altogether, compared with only 8.5 per cent of girls.<sup>73</sup> In the industrialised world, boys

### Snakes and ladders

#### Factors that facilitate and impede successful primary school completion for girls

LADDERS (GIRLS)	Strong	Very strong	Exceptionally strong
A bright and welcoming school			++++
School within reachable distance (girls)		+++	
Affectionate, kind and empathetic teachers			++++
A mother who values education for the child			++++
Good relationship between mother and father			
Adult in the family who values education		+++	
Mother concerned about welfare of the child		+++	
Strict monitoring by parents / family members			
Adults in the family who can care for siblings			++++
Having fewer siblings, but not being the eldest		+++	
Being the youngest child		+++	
Role models / success stories where education has resulted in tangible benefits in terms of social status and / or livelihood / upward mobility (girls).			++++

<b>SNAKES (GIRLS)</b>	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Very strong</b>	<b>Exceptionally strong</b>
Having a mother who goes out to work for long hours		+++	
Large family and many siblings to care for		+++	
Birth order – or being eldest			++++
Having an uncaring mother		+++	
Alcoholism in the family (father / mother)		+++	
Domestic violence	++		
Being sick or disabled		+++	
Being in a lower caste / disadvantaged community	++		
Death, disability and illness in the family		+++	
Work during peak agricultural cycles (regularly)		+++	
Where education has not led to tangible benefits in terms of social status / livelihood / upward mobility of local youth (negative role models)		+++	
Drought / other disasters		+++	
Hunger (persisting)		+++	
Teachers get children to do personal chores / Teachers beat children or other harsh punishment	++		
Being a girl	++		
Parents / sibling with disability			++++
School that is far away	++		
Burden of work (at home / outside)		+++	
Social practices: early marriage		+++	
Social practices: dowry (more education leads to greater demand for dowry)	++		
Teacher addiction (safety of girls threatened)			++++

are doing less well than girls across the board and a number of government strategies are in place to redress the balance. Many of these try to address the fact that boys' disaffection with school may be connected to the way they are learning to be men. In Nigeria, the Conscientising Male Adolescents programme involves boys in school in a year of weekly discussions with a specially trained teacher. They talk about gender role, relationships,

their own families and the pressure to be 'macho'. Boys who have been through the programme have skills in discussion and debate that make them role models for others.<sup>74</sup>

## 7. What still needs to be done?

There are a number of factors that can be put in place to ensure that girls get to school and stay there. Research in South Asia identified the

'ladders' – conditions that make it easier for girls to attend primary school and the 'snakes' – those which make it more difficult, which can be seen in the table opposite. They also identified which of these factors were the strongest priorities.<sup>75</sup>

Country by country, there are many successful projects and initiatives that have helped to improve gender parity at both primary and secondary level, many of which deal with some of the issues in the table above. Some are at regional level, following international commitments; some are at government level and some at community level.

There are many reasons why girls do not attend school, therefore a range of strategies and solutions is required to increase attendance and completion of school by girls. **From the evidence in this chapter, some government and community strategies are working:**

- Government commitment to free and compulsory primary education has increased school enrolment across the world. Such a policy needs continued financial commitment from national and donor governments.
- Scholarships and stipends have increased girls' attendance in several countries, including Bangladesh, Brazil and Mexico. Educational programmes – both formal and informal – for girls who are not in school have enabled these girls to continue to learn.
- Creating a girl-friendly environment and improving the quality of education that girls can receive. This has been done by making the classroom and curriculum materials gender sensitive and child-centred, increasing the numbers of trained female teachers and ensuring that they are remunerated for their efforts, improving the sanitation facilities in school, and developing programmes which focus on life skills.
- Promoting child protection in schools ensures a safe environment for girls, in particular. This has been done by ensuring that schools are secure, that girls do not have to spend time alone

with male teachers, that lighting is good in and around the school, and that schools are close to children's homes.

Sexual harassment and abuse in schools, whether by teachers or peers, should be stamped out.

- Putting girls, their parents and communities in control and giving them a say in education leads to more committed pupils. This includes through active participation in school committees and supporting efforts from early childhood development through to tertiary education.
- Governments that have changed and enforced early marriage legislation need to influence the attitudes of families and communities, in order to see results.

## 8. Girls' voices

*“The main problem in our community is poverty. Parents do not have enough money to send their children to school. Some parents use their children to increase the household income. They force their daughters to abandon school to do some petty trading in the market, or to get married. Sometimes they even send them abroad to do domestic work.”*

Children's opinions recorded in a focus group discussion in Togo.<sup>76</sup>

*“Going to school has changed my life. I've learnt many things and made friends. But what I like most is my teacher, because she listens to me and is very loving. I've seen what happens to other kids in my neighbourhood who don't go to school. They spend their days sniffing glue, begging for money and getting into trouble. I feel sorry for them.”*

Yuleni, 13, Venezuela.<sup>77</sup>