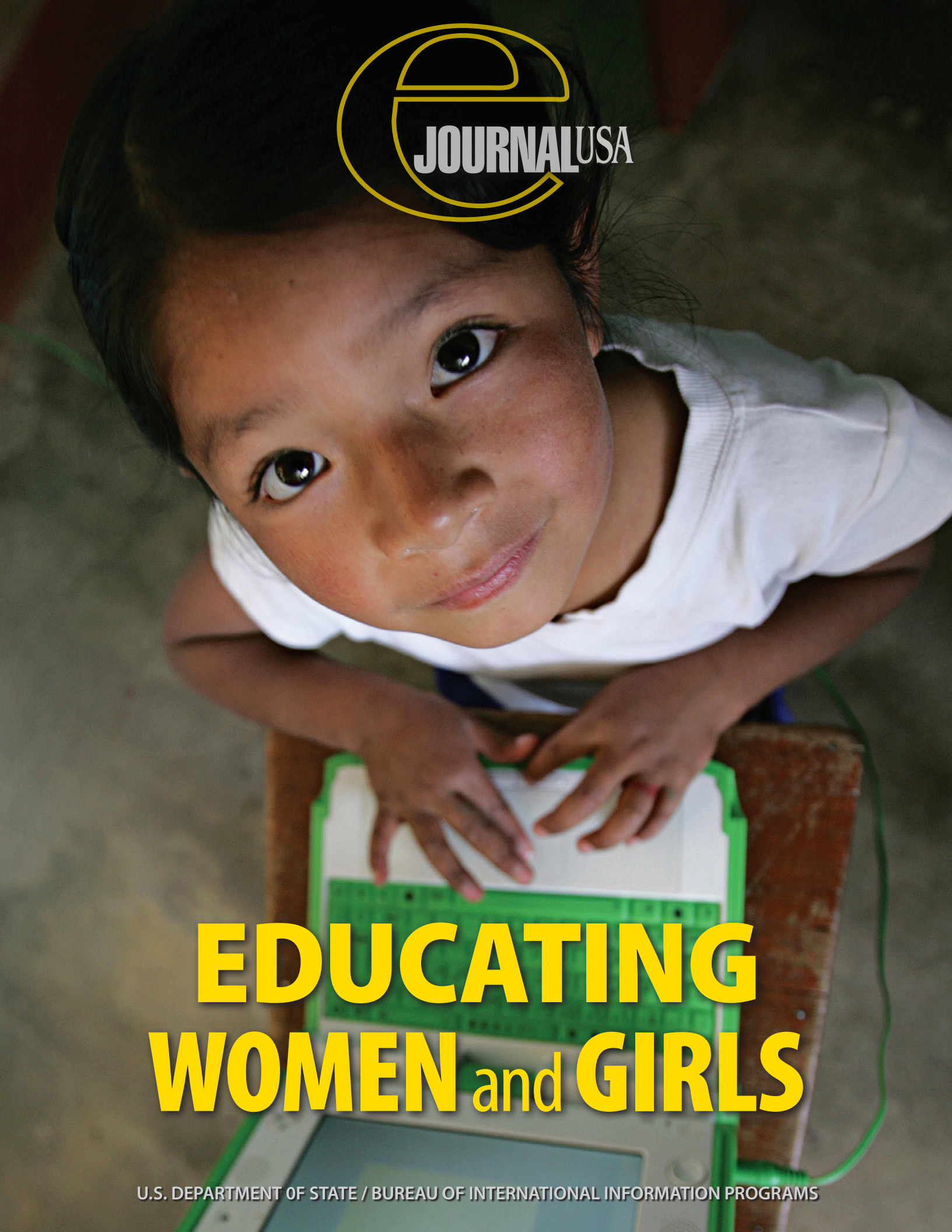

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EDUCATING WOMEN and GIRLS

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Editor, *eJournal USA*
IIP/PUBJ
U.S. Department of State
2200 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20522-0501
USA
E-mail: eJournalUSA@state.gov

Educating Women and Girls Is Key to Meeting 21st Century Demands

By Ambassador Melanne Verveer

The education of women and girls is essential not only to promoting gender equality, but also to addressing the full spectrum of 21st century challenges. Research shows that investing in education is one of the most effective, high-yielding development investments a country can make.

Much progress has certainly been made since 2000, when nations around the world committed to Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2 for the achievement of universal primary education; yet considerable gaps remain, particularly for girls. According to some estimates, 72 million children worldwide do not attend school, and 54 percent of the unschooled are girls. In addition, although gender parity in primary education has increased over the past decade, a parity gap of 6 million still remains — and it is even starker in the developing world. In Yemen, nearly 80 percent of girls out of school are unlikely to enroll, as compared with 36 percent of boys. In sub-Saharan Africa, almost 12 million girls are expected to not enroll.

The quality of education is also a serious problem because, even where school enrollment has increased, many children are still leaving school without basic numeracy and literacy skills and are therefore ill equipped to compete and prosper. Improving girls' access to secondary education is yet another area that needs greater attention.

Countries with the lowest standards of living and the highest rates of illiteracy are usually countries that do not educate their girls. Left unchecked, these inequalities in education will perpetuate violence, poverty and instability and will keep nations from achieving economic, political and social progress. Further, the lack of access to education can follow a girl for a lifetime; of the more than 700 million illiterate adults in the world, two-thirds are women.

Girls' education is valuable both in its own right and because it fuels development. Creating incentives to support girls' education — and, in particular, girls' secondary education — catalyzes a range of positive outcomes. Empirical data show that increasing girls' education correlates with economic growth, increased agricultural yields and greater labor productivity. Educated mothers are more likely to ensure their babies are vaccinated and receive proper nutrition and they tend to have smaller, healthier and better educated families. Children of educated mothers are more likely to attend school themselves.

U.S. Department of State

Melanne Verveer

The Payoffs are Considerable

Providing girls one extra year of primary school education can increase future wages by 10 to 20 percent, and an extra year of secondary school increases future wages by 15 to 25 percent. Secondary school also offers a valuable opportunity for girls to learn healthy behaviors. In some countries, for example, AIDS spreads twice as fast among uneducated girls. In places where child marriage is an accepted norm, providing parents a tangible incentive to keep their daughters in school is often the best means to prevent this harmful practice. The evidence is clear: When women and girls are educated, all of society benefits.

It is estimated that 31 of the 196 countries in

These girls in Sierra Leone received U.S. aid to resist economic pressure to drop out of school.

the world are at risk of not achieving gender parity in primary-school enrollment rates by the 2015 MDG deadline. With fewer than five years left to meet both the MDG and the similar World Education Forum's Education for All goal, the global community must step up efforts to address the barriers that keep far too many girls illiterate and out of school.

The United States is focusing on initiatives to "incentivize" girls' education — to give parents tangible rewards, such as a bag of flour or a can of oil, for sending their daughters to school. In too many places, parents see no reason to educate a girl. A daughter is often viewed as a burden, relegated to performing arduous household chores and even forced into child marriage. We are stepping up efforts for programs that increase girls' enrollment in and completion of primary, secondary and tertiary education with funding for direct educational resources, such as books, uniforms and school fees, which are common barriers to enrollment. Our investments also cover indirect costs of schooling through scholarships, stipends and school health and nutrition programs. Furthermore, we place an emphasis on capacity building for schools, teachers, civil society and communities to enhance the quality of education and the positive results.

Through our engagement with local leaders and communities, we are helping to raise awareness of the benefits of keeping girls in school and cultivating wider grassroots acceptance of girls' education. From improving school learning environments and supporting teacher training in Afghanistan to targeting girls at risk for HIV/AIDS in Zambia, the United States is working on multiple fronts to ensure that the education of women and girls is an integral part of our engagement with the global community and our 21st century agenda. As Secretary of State Clinton has said, investing in women and girls is not just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do. ■

Melanne Verveer is the State Department ambassador-at-large for global women's issues.

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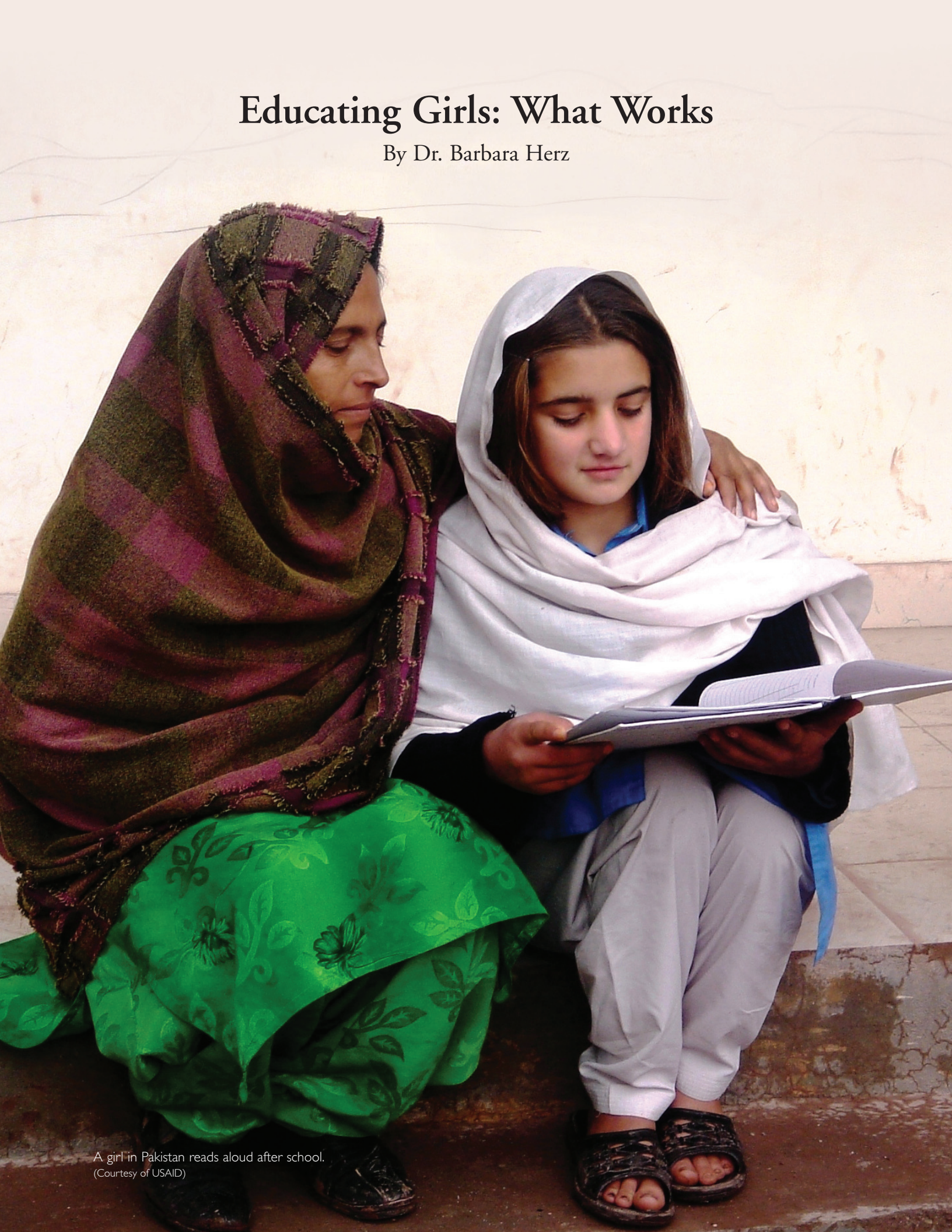
Educating Girls: What Works

By Dr. Barbara Herz



A girl in Pakistan reads aloud after school.
(Courtesy of USAID)

Courtesy of Ray Witlin/World Bank

Educating women and girls not only improves their own lives, but also benefits their families and communities and stimulates economic growth. Here a teacher in India works with female students.

Many countries have found effective ways to offset the costs to families of educating girls and to improve education quality so that incurring the cost is more worthwhile. Experience in primary education suggests a four-point approach can work. Less attention has gone to examining what works in secondary education, but it is reasonable to start with these four points:

- **Make girls' schooling affordable**: The fastest and most direct way for governments to boost school enrollments and attendance for girls is to reduce the costs to parents of educating their daughters.
    - **Cut school fees**: China and Indonesia, among many other countries, saw the enrollment of girls in primary school increase following fee reductions as part of broader education reforms. For example, primary school enrollment in Uganda jumped 70 percent after fees were cut in the late 1990s as part of major education reforms. Girls' enrollments went from 63 percent to 83 percent, and enrollment among the poorest fifth of girls went from 46 percent to 82 percent. But success created its own challenges in Uganda as in many countries — average classroom size ballooned to more than 100 children, and quality remains a concern. Yet these challenges arise because of increasing enrollments.
    - **Provide scholarships**: Stipend or scholarship programs can help increase the enrollment of girls at both the primary and secondary levels. Few large-scale scholarship programs exist, but perhaps the most notable is the Female Secondary School Stipend Program in Bangladesh. Thanks to the program, roughly two-thirds of the girls are now in secondary school — matching the boys. Each rural girl is eligible for the scholarship if she attends school regularly, gets good grades and does not get married while in school. Not only does the program help keep girls in schools, but also it encourages high academic achievement and delays early marriage. Another successful scholarship program is Progresa in Mexico, which gives poor families grants to help offset the costs of sending children to school, particularly benefitting girls. Brazil, Kenya

The Benefits Of Girls' Education

Courtesy of USAID

Schools are an important setting to teach foundational skills. Here students in Pakistan read a USAID handout on safe drinking water.

The benefits of educating girls — to countries, to families and to girls themselves — are so substantial that some economists, including Lawrence Summers, a former Harvard University president and former director of President Obama's National Economic Council, have stated that educating girls may be the single highest return investment available in the developing world. Educating girls not only stimulates economic growth, but also improves the well-being of women and gives them more agency in their communities and countries.

What are some of the benefits?

- **Higher incomes**: World Bank studies find that, on the whole, one more year of primary education beyond the mean boosts a person's eventual wage rate on average by 5 percent to 15 percent, with generally higher returns for girls than for boys. One more year of secondary school beyond the mean boosts a person's eventual wage rate on average by 15 percent to 25 percent, again with a generally higher increase for girls than for boys.
- **Faster economic growth**: Education for men or women generally leads to economic growth. Increasing the number of women with secondary education boosts per capita income growth, as does moving toward parity in the number of years of education for girls and boys.
- **Food Security**: A 63-country study by the International Food Policy Research Institute found that expanded female education resulted in better farming practices, which contributed to about 40 percent of the decline in malnutrition from 1970 to 1995.

and Nicaragua have also had promising results from scholarship programs.

- **Make school a practical option and "girl-friendly"**: Building schools that provide quality education closer to where students live, training teachers (particularly female teachers), supplying books and basic teaching materials, and offering flexible class hours can all help increase girls' enrollment in school. For example, in the 1970s, Indonesia gave priority to education reform. Indonesia built more than 60,000 schools (at a cost of 1.5 percent of gross domestic product), recruited and trained teachers and cut school fees. Indonesia started with a primary-school enrollment rate of 60 percent in the 1970s and today Indonesia's primary school enrollment rate is nearly 100 percent for both boys and girls. Experience from across the developing world shows the impact of providing a well-run school nearby.
  - **Improve water and sanitation**: As girls grow up, water and sanitation are essential, not just "nice to have." Experience from Africa to Asia shows girls do not stay in school during menses without access to water and sanitation. The problem is particularly crucial in boosting girls' enrollment and retention in secondary school.
  - **Ensure privacy**: In societies where women and girls are traditionally sequestered from males, ensuring girls' privacy through separate schools or separate hours for girls in schools shared with boys may be essential to increasing enrollment of girls. Experience in Pakistan and Afghanistan has shown

continued on page 8

• **Family well-being**: Educating girls is the surest path to smaller, healthier and better-educated families. Women spend more time than men do in caring for children. Studies find that resources that women control go more directly to help the family than do the resources that men control. The more education a woman has, the more likely it is she can earn a higher income, which will go to benefit her family. In addition, when women are educated they and their husbands tend to want smaller families and to invest more in the health and education of each child.

- In countries where three-fourths of women have a secondary education, women typically have two or three children, the children are more likely to attend school and child mortality drops as family income rises.
- According to many studies, a year of schooling for the mother beyond the average in her country cuts infant mortality by 5 percent to 10 percent.
- Where mothers are educated, girls and boys generally go to school longer and study more. Often the mother's education matters more than the father's, especially in countries where the gap in schooling between girls and boys is greatest.
- Girls who are literate, and particularly girls who reach secondary school, are more likely to avoid HIV/AIDS because they can better obtain information, stand up for themselves and take more control of their lives.
- Having smaller, healthier and better educated families in turn helps raise economic productivity, equips people to enter new lines of work, eases environmental pressures and slows population growth, which many countries consider important societal changes.

• **Women's own well-being**: As Nobel laureate Amartya Sen stresses, when women are educated they gain voice and agency in their lives, giving them more economic opportunities, encouraging women's political participation, and transforming society for the better. These benefits begin sooner than may appear at first glance. Keeping girls in school through 10th-12th grade quickly produces positive changes. These girls do not marry young; they can cope better in the 21st century, help their families and take advantage of opportunities as economic and social circumstances change.

© AP Images/Martin Mejia

It is important to improve the quality of education and ensure that students learn necessary skills. Here a student in Peru learns how to use a computer.

• **The virtuous circle**: The benefits of educating girls start with primary school but rise if girls go to secondary school. As a first step, many countries are striving for universal primary education (UPE), which is one of the United Nations Millennium Development goals along with gender equality. Much progress has been made, but the time has come to press equally for secondary education for girls and boys.

In fact, doing so will help achieve UPE. When secondary education for girls spreads, those girls can go on to earn higher incomes, assume roles outside of the home or farm and reach parity with boys. Educating greater numbers of women and girls also helps meet the growing need for teachers and health workers, which is crucial for societies in which women and girls must be served by women teachers or doctors. ■

–Barbara Herz

What Hinders Girls' Education

With the substantial benefits that accrue to families and societies from educating girls, why aren't more girls in school? The basic difficulty is that most of the benefits of educating girls accrue to families, societies and to girls themselves when the girls grow up while the costs must be borne now. While the same is true of educating boys, in many societies girls are expected to perform more household and farm chores than their brothers, which can make the immediate, short-term cost of educating girls seem greater. Moreover, if parents expect that their daughters will marry and leave the family, educating a daughter may seem less reliable an investment in the future than educating a son. Even in countries where most of the cost of primary and secondary education is borne by the government, some costs still fall on parents, and those costs can be substantial, particularly for parents in poverty.

The costs of education include:

• **Direct fees**: The costs of tuition and textbooks can amount to 5 percent to 10 percent of average household income and 20 percent to 30 percent of household income for poor families.

• **Indirect fees**: Parents are sometimes charged fees to join parent-teacher associations or to supplement teachers' salaries.

Ratio of Girls to Boys in Primary and Secondary Grades

Region	Girls	Boys
Sub-Saharan Africa	88	100
South Asia	91	100
Middle East & North Africa	96	100
East Asia & Pacific Region	102	100
Latin America & Caribbean	102	100
Europe & Central Asia	97	100

Source: Council on Foreign Relations

• **Indirect costs**: Parents incur costs for things such as safe transportation to and from school or clothing to meet cultural standards. These costs can be higher for girls than for boys.

• **Opportunity costs**: The loss of children's time in performing household or farm chores or their contributions to family income when they attend school may concern parents, especially parents in poverty. In societies where girls traditionally do more chores than boys, such as fetching wood or water or caring for younger siblings, the cost of educating girls may seem higher to parents. Girls may then be kept home more often than boys. ■

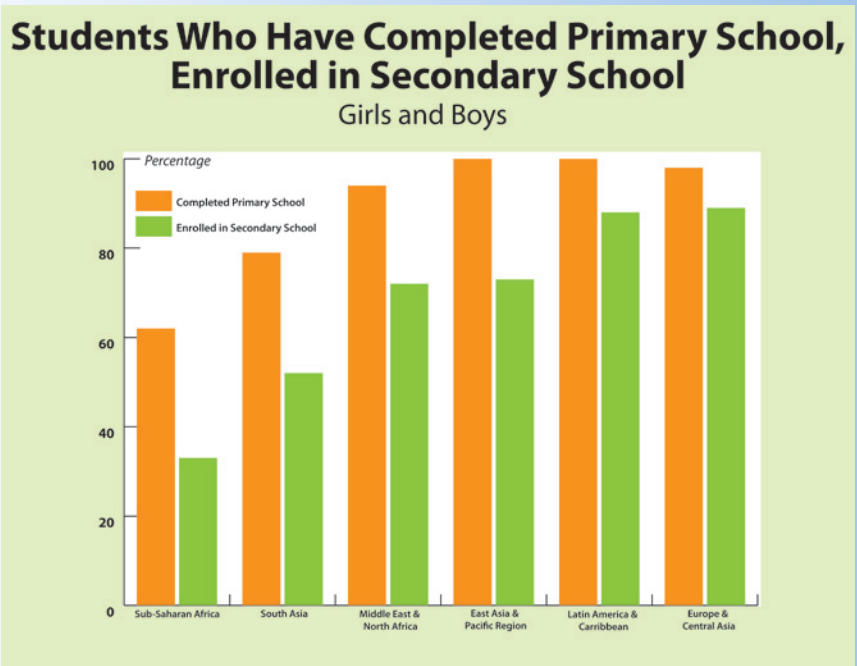
-B.H.

Educating Girls: What Works continued from page 6

that parents are more likely to send their daughters to school if the classes are not co-ed, especially beyond the early primary-school ages.

- **Provide gender-neutral teaching materials**: It is also important for schools to update books and curriculums so that teaching materials do not depict girls and women only in traditional roles and instead encourage girls to try different lines of work and to participate more broadly in society.
- **Train more female teachers**: In many countries, recruiting and training more female teachers encourages girls' enrollment. In some places, particularly where women and girls are more sequestered from males, for reasons of reputation or safety, parents may be more willing to send their daughters to school if they will interact with female teachers rather than with male teachers.
- **Tackle malnutrition**: Improving children's health and making sure they do not go hungry also matters. Chronic malnutrition affects learning capacity and is a major problem in many parts of the world. For example, one-fourth of children in Africa and some two-fifths in South Asia are malnourished. In several countries in Africa and South Asia, school lunch programs, sometimes with take-home rations, boost enrollment and attendance by up to 30 percent to 50 percent and help to improve test scores. Where girls are malnourished and less healthy than boys, such steps are particularly important to ensuring that girls do well in school.

Where Girls Are Out Of School



Source: Council on Foreign Relations

In the developing world, millions of girls still attend school for just a few years or have no access to education. With the recent drive for universal primary education, enrollments have risen dramatically since 2000: by roughly 20 percent in Africa, by about 15 percent in South Asia and by 10 percent in the Middle East and North Africa. Primary school enrollments of girls were already high in East Asia and in Latin America. Despite these gains, however, large shortfalls remain, especially in parts of South Asia and in parts of Africa. The shortfalls tend to be greatest where poverty is severe, in remote areas, and in areas where girls and women are more socially secluded or where conflict persists. Of the 100 million children still not enrolled in primary school, roughly 60 million are girls. Of course, enrollment does not automatically mean regular attendance. Moreover, reaching UPE will not guarantee long-term educational success for girls. Millions more children, particularly girls, never reach or start secondary school, and transitioning girls to secondary school and keeping them there through graduation is a critical issue, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. ■

-B.H.

• **Focus on the quality of education**: Over the past decade, many countries have focused on getting children enrolled in primary school. Today, however, it is increasingly urgent to focus on the quality of education, not just the number of children enrolled. Children, particularly in poorer areas, often learn little in primary school and are not ready for secondary school. Again the problem is more acute for girls, who may have fewer opportunities for primary education and also for studying. If the quality of education is poor, it may seem futile to parents to incur the costs of educating children. If parents perceive those costs to be higher for girls than for boys, it becomes even more crucial to provide high-quality education for girls. Promising approaches for improving educational quality have emerged, such as:

- Training enough teachers to keep average class size below 40 students.
- Improving teacher training to replace traditional rote methods of learning with interactive approaches and problem-solving, as in Kenya, Swaziland, Bangladesh and India.
- Providing adequate books and supplies. In many low-income countries, children must share scarce books, but providing books can boost enrollment and achievement. In Peru, for example, providing free textbooks boosted the odds that girls would enroll in school by 30 percent.
- Designing school curriculums that equip children for the 21st century and modern jobs, with expanded math and science education as in Brazil and India. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) implements a number of programs to improve math and science education. USAID is currently working with Pakistan's federal and provincial ministries of education and the American Institutes for Research to expand math and science education in the country. One such endeavor, the ED-LINKS project, provides math

and science kits to Pakistani schools, reaching more than 180,000 students.

• **Mobilize communities**: To educate girls, especially in poorer areas, it is crucial to mobilize communities to commit to educate all children, find an acceptable teacher, encourage teachers and students and help meet the practical needs of schools, students and teachers. A number of such efforts have yielded positive results.

- In Bangladesh, the long-standing Bangladesh Rural Action Committee (BRAC) now provides nonformal schools for more than 1 million highly disadvantaged children, two-thirds of them girls, as part of a broader effort focused on mobilizing the poor throughout Bangladesh to help themselves. More than 90 percent of students pass the government's fifth grade examination and make the transition to secondary school. The BRAC approach is now being tried in several other countries, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tanzania, Uganda and Sudan.
- In India's Rajasthan state, a program now in 500 schools (and expanding to more than 2,300) sponsored by Educate Girls Globally has worked with communities and the state government for two years to bring nearly every girl into the government's primary schools. The program has also introduced more interactive teaching, resulting in gains in learning scores after a few months.
- In parts of Pakistan's Balochistan province that lack government schools, the provincial government and a local nongovernmental organization worked with communities in the 1990s to organize community schools. Teachers, many of them teenage young women, were selected by communities, trained, and paid by the government. In four years, almost 200 schools were organized and 87 percent of girls were enrolled, compared with the provincial average of 18 percent enrollment of girls.
- Mali's community participation programs in education have contributed to increasing school enrollment of girls by roughly two-thirds and improving their test scores. ■

Dr. Barbara Herz is a specialist in girls' education policy. A member of the Council on Foreign Relations, Herz has worked for the U.S. Agency for International Development and the World Bank. At the World Bank, Herz started the Women in Development Division and led the bank's work on education and health in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

This article is drawn largely from Herz, Barbara and Gene B. Sperling. 2004. What Works in Girls' Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World. *Washington, D.C.: Council on Foreign Relations.*
A version of this article with reference notes can be found at http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/publication/2011/06/20110624094700aidan0.9995037html.

The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.

The Will and Resources to Act

Much is known about how to bring girls into school and help them stay through the secondary level. Getting the job done, however, is mainly a question of political will in deciding how to use scarce resources. Will education have priority? As understanding grows about how much and how quickly education can result in tangible benefits for girls, their families and their countries, more communities may summon the political will and resources to provide girls and boys equal access to quality education. Countries like Brazil, China and India that lead the way in economic growth have invested — and are continuing to invest — in education. Countries that want to be economically competitive now and in the future and secure good living standards for their people can take no better action than to educate their youth — girls and boys alike — today. ■

-B.H.

Giving Back

HOW HAVE YOU USED YOUR EDUCATION TO HELP OTHERS?

Courtesy of Xerox Corporation

Ursula Burns

Ursula Burns

Chairman and chief executive of Xerox Corporation. With engineering degrees from the Polytechnic Institute of New York University and Columbia University, Burns also helps to lead President Obama's national program on STEM (science, technology, engineering and math).

My mother would always remind me: "Where you are is not who you are." I grew up in a poor neighborhood in New York City. My mother saw education as the way up and out for her children. It didn't take long for me to see the wisdom in her beliefs. Bucking the trends back then for women to pursue nursing and teaching careers, I chose mechanical engineering. I was charting my own path up and out. Xerox soon opened its doors to me as an engineering intern, and I've never looked back. That's also when I started paying it forward by advocating for more young women to pursue careers in math and science. Through programs such as President Obama's Change the Equation initiative I'm helping women and minorities appreciate the life-changing benefits of shaping our world through engineering and innovation. Because who you are will always be more powerful than where you are. Turns out my mother was right.

Alexandra Cousteau

Holder of degree in government from Georgetown University the founder and president of Blue Legacy International.

My grandfather, Jacques-Yves Cousteau, always told me that we will never save the world unless women have equal access to education. I was fortunate that my family was able not only to give me the opportunity to attend good schools, but also helped me explore and experience the world outside the classroom. Whether we were on expedition, rescuing wildlife or working on community conservation, my formative years were spent learning with my hands, my eyes and my imagination.

I studied at Georgetown University, where such luminaries as Muhammad Yunus helped further shape my worldview. It was during this time that I began combining my childhood awe for our natural world with the conviction that we each have important roles to play in environmental preservation. The work I do through Blue Legacy International is shaped by this philosophy. Our projects help people understand and value their everyday relationship with water and show that protecting our environment is a way to work towards peace, opportunity and justice.

© Blue Legacy

Alexandra Cousteau

Sophia Khawly
A 2011 graduate from Florida State University with a degree in nursing.

Growing up, I traveled to Haiti each summer to visit my relatives and I saw how difficult life was for Haitian children. I founded the nongovernmental organiztion Hope for Haiti's Children so Haitian children could attend school for free. Every summer, I volunteer in Port-au-Prince in the schools' health clinics. I vividly remember one of my patients, Ezequiel, who was 7 years old and malnourished. I was supposed to vaccinate him for hepatitis B, but it was pointless because he lacked the nutrients necessary for the immunization to be effective.

I graduated from high school as a licensed practical nurse. In nursing, we are taught to provide holistic care and to act as a patient's advocate, so I could not ignore Ezequiel's poor nutritional state. I decided to incorporate a meal plan within his school so that the students were guaranteed two meals each day. This summer, I was overjoyed to see that Ezequiel had grown into a healthier boy.

Courtesy of Melissa Meschler

Sophia Khawly

Courtesy of Google

Marissa Mayer

Marissa Mayer
Is the vice president of location and local services at Google. She earned degrees in symbolic systems and computer science from Stanford University.

My education made me curious and confident, and those traits have enabled me to help others. Education really piqued my curiosity — I've always been very curious by my nature — but in school I learned how that curiosity could be rewarded. I loved learning and being able to figure things out. It is my curiosity that made me eager to work on Google Search and our quest to organize the world's information. I'm proud of the tools we've built at Google to help people satisfy their curiosity, get better information and, hopefully, make better decisions.

My education also gave me confidence. It's that confidence that has allowed me to work not as a woman but as a "geek" at Google. In male-dominated industries like technology, women need role models to progress. Women role models and mentors helped me build my confidence, and I now hope to do my small part by doing the same for other young women.

Courtesy of the The UNCF/Merck Science Initiative

Oluwadamiloa Oladeru

Oluwadamiloa Oladeru

A 2011 graduate from Yale University with a degree in biology and African studies.

Born in Nigeria, a country torn by incomprehensible degrees of disparities, I was ignorant of my rights to a proper education. As I grew older, my desire for knowledge led to rejection — I was young and female and my abilities were therefore underestimated. Despite the challenges of migrating to America, I am grateful for the educational opportunities I have here, especially in the sciences. Since education is the best gift I have received, I did not want to wait until becoming "accomplished" to share it with the neglected and underserved. This inspired me to establish the Read at Peace Library in Erin-Ijesa, Nigeria. Education is a human right. It reduces poverty, improves health and, most importantly, affirms human dignity. I hope my commitment to improve education in the developing world will inspire other young people to do the same.

Amy Qian

A 2011 graduate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a degree in mechanical engineering. Qian has helped to invent sustainable devices for cooking and heating.

Some of my fondest childhood memories are of being barefoot, covered in sawdust, building things from whatever I could find. For me, making things has always been more than a hobby; it is a way of learning about and modifying my world.

In 2009, I traveled to China and met 20 college students from rural communities in Qinghai, where issues like clean water, sustainable energy and education are urgent. However, the students felt unsure which technologies could help them and were therefore unable to form a solution on their own. I organized a two-day workshop in which small teams built simple projects of wood and nails. Hesitant at first, the students gained confidence as their ideas materialized. Afterward, they eagerly suggested devices they could make to help their parents at home. Even though the students were not trained engineers, they discovered that there were pieces of the world that they were capable of changing.

Courtesy of Amy Qian

Amy Qian

The Right to Education

By Dr. Kishore Singh

© UN Photo by Eskinder Debebe

Education for all is a right supported by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and many other international conventions. Here the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) supports the Zarghuna Girls School in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Women have historically been subjected to social injustice and educational deprivation. At the World Education Forum in 2000, 164 countries made a collective commitment to the Education for All (EFA) goals, which include achieving gender parity in education by 2005 and equal access to quality basic education by 2015. Similarly, the United Nations Millennium Declaration, also in 2000, established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with the commitment to achieve gender parity in access to primary and secondary education and to empower women (MDG Number 3) by 2015.

However, many countries are falling behind in carrying out the EFA agenda, and the prospects of achieving MDG No. 3 are bleak. The daunting challenge is to bridge the gap between commitments and reality. Doing so requires governments to place greater emphasis on human rights as the basis underpinning such commitments and to ensure equal access to education as a key component in upholding basic human rights.

Access to Education Is a Human Right

Educating women and girls is often viewed in terms of the many positive benefits that education confers to them, their children and their societies. Educated women can participate and contribute to a country's social, economic and political development. However, educating women and girls should, a priori, be viewed as a human rights imperative rather than one undertaken solely because of potential benefits to their children or to society. The right to education is an internationally recognized human right, to which women and girls are as much entitled as men and boys. The Universal Declaration

Courtesy of World Bank

Students use the library at Hanoi University in Vietnam.

of Human Rights (1948) establishes every person's right to education. Inspired by the Universal Declaration, various international human rights conventions prohibit any discrimination based on sex or gender. Access to free, compulsory primary education is an inalienable right of every child — boys and girls alike — under all such conventions.

The right to education as an entitlement is inextricably linked with the right to education as empowerment. Women's right to education, both as entitlement and as empowerment, is established by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979). The convention lays down the obligations of the states parties to "take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure them equal rights with men in the field of education" and "in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women" access to education at all levels and in all its forms.

The Six Goals of Education for All:

- Expand early childhood care and education.
- Provide free and compulsory primary education for all.
- Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults.
- Increase adult literacy by 50 percent.
- Achieve gender parity by 2005, gender equality by 2015.
- Improve the quality of education.

International human rights conventions require that states incorporate a commitment to internationally recognized human rights into their respective domestic laws. Tying a human rights framework to a country's domestic law is essential in ensuring educational opportunities for women and girls. Access to education is a human right that is essential for the exercise of many other human rights, including the right to economic and social empowerment. ■

Dr. Kishore Singh is an international law expert and the United Nations special rapporteur on the right to education.

The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.

"We Women Have Paved the Way to a New Life!"

USAID IS TEACHING LITERACY TO WOMEN AND GIRLS IN MOROCCO

By Kristen Potter

Courtesy of USAID/Morocco

Moroccan women learn foundational mathematics skills as part of a USAID education program.

Rachida, like many other Moroccan women, never had the opportunity to attend primary school. When the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) offered a literacy course for women in the village of Ain Jdid, Rachida was willing to endure taunts from other villagers in order to learn to read and write.

The pre-literacy program that benefited Rachida and more than 10,000 other Moroccan women was designed for mothers and based on a strategy to improve literacy skills while promoting parental support for their children's education, particularly girls' education. The literacy and numeracy skills acquired by Rachida and her classmates remain a source of pride among the women and their families. As mothers, these women now share the joy of learning with their school-aged children, some of whom are beneficiaries of other USAID educational programs.

Although Morocco has made substantial progress in increasing access to education, rural women and girls remain the most marginalized group with only one out of seven rural girls enrolled in secondary school. Among rural Moroccan girls aged 15-24, three out of five are illiterate. But not Rachida. Not anymore.

Morocco and the United States: Education Partners

Over the past 15 years, in partnership with the Moroccan Ministry of Education, USAID has supported a growing portfolio of programs that promote girls' and

Courtesy of USAID/Morocco

USAID/Morocco supports a number of programs targeted at educating women and girls including pre-literacy and literacy courses.

women's education. The Morocco Education for Girls program (1997–2003), for example, promoted access and attainment for rural girls and led to a 21 percent increase in girls' primary school enrollment. Furthermore, the percentage of girls in the targeted regions who reached the sixth grade increased by 24 percent, demonstrating that attainment for girls had been positively affected as well.

Despite a long history of successful collaboration between USAID and the Ministry of Education, low levels of literacy, particularly among women and girls, remain an overarching concern in Morocco. While almost 95 percent of Moroccan children enroll in school (including 92 percent of rural girls), literacy rates in Morocco remain low. Almost a third of youth aged 15-24 cannot read and write.

First Steps to Literacy

The first step to improving literacy among women and girls is identifying the problem and providing immediate support.

As part of the Ministry of Education's national efforts to enhance educational quality, this year USAID is launching a pilot program to assess basic reading and math skills among early primary school students. Data from this student-level intervention will be used to help Moroccan teachers improve teaching practices and will provide feedback to parents on their children's academic strengths and weaknesses. The data will also be used by school administrators to help structure a teacher-training program based on students' learning needs.

This pilot assessment will take place in Rachida's region, Doukkala-Abda, a region with traditionally low school enrollment and high illiteracy. This assessment is the first step to ensure that every child learns to read and do basic mathematical operations. Research has shown that the early learning of foundation skills is significantly correlated to academic success, but as Rachida will also tell you, literacy is the key to becoming an independent and lifelong learner. When Rachida speaks about learning to read and thus being able to better support her children's education, she smiles and says that "we women have paved the way to a new life!" ■

Kristen Potter is the education team leader with USAID/Morocco in Rabat, Morocco.

A version of this article with reference notes can be found at http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/publication/2011/06/20110624094943aidan0.4620935.html

The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.

Harnessing the Ocean

A YOUNG SALVADORAN WOMAN STUDIES (AND TEACHES) OCEANOGRAPHY

By Nadia S. Ahmed

Beatriz Recinos doesn't let obstacles get in the way of her education. An undergraduate at the University of El Salvador, Recinos became interested in oceanography when she visited the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego in the United States as a secondary school student while she was visiting her family.

When Recinos started university, she knew she wanted to study oceanography, but it was not offered as a major. In fact, explains Recinos, "there's no oceanography major in Central America. In Costa Rica, they have marine biology but it's too far from my home." Instead, Recinos decided to major in physics. While there are many women who study chemistry or biology at her university, there are not many women who study physics and there are no female physics professors. But Recinos thinks that as more women like her start careers in fields like physics, more young women will study those subjects.

U.S. Embassy San Salvador

Beatriz Recinos helped design and teach a geophysics course that includes oceanography.

Despite the constraints, Recinos was determined to study oceanography. In 2008, she got her chance when she studied for a year at Humboldt State University in Arcata, California, with a Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (UGRAD) scholarship. "The classes were really interesting for me. It was the best experience for me and for my career," she says. At Humboldt, Recinos and the other students went out to sea to take samples, and Recinos experienced oceanography firsthand. When she returned to El Salvador, Recinos knew that oceanography was the field for her.

But Recinos also wanted to give back and get other students interested in oceanography. As Recinos explains, "It's a very cool major because [it is] related to earth science and global warming." She wanted to introduce students to oceanography so that they might apply their knowledge to solve global challenges like climate change. "It [is] very positive to orient young students [to] fix those problems."

Recinos and a fellow UGRAD alumna, Fatima Soriano, received a "Building a Better Future" Fulbright grant to create and teach two classes. One is a geophysics class for secondary school students that incorporates oceanography lessons into the syllabus. "They are applying what they're learning in physics and in math," she said.

Recinos helped teach the class until recently, when she became too busy with her internship at a local company applying oceanography to a renewable energy project. Recinos, however, still helps to teach the second class, an oceanography lab for first-year undergraduate students. "They can start [studying oceanography] from the beginning of their careers, even though there's no oceanography major."

After Recinos graduates in 2012, she hopes to pursue a doctoral degree or a master's degree in physical oceanography or marine renewable energy with a Fulbright scholarship. "I would like to come back and work on projects about marine renewable energy here in El Salvador," she says. Through science, Recinos hopes to help find energy solutions: "A person who knows math, science and technology can be more sensitive to people's problems and try to fix things."

Recinos has shown that she has the drive to apply her education to fix problems and to overcome challenges. For Recinos it is important to "not let anyone put you down. Just work hard and demonstrate that you can do it also." ■

Nadia S. Ahmed is a managing editor of eJournal USA.

Teacher Transforms Life with Click of a Mouse

USAID TRAINS TEACHERS IN PHILIPPINES

By Robert Burch

Courtesy of USAID/Philippines

Maria Dulce Mayordomo (right) mentors Marlem Ugalde, who teaches in the same school in the southern Philippines.

What kind of education is needed for a person to succeed in the 21st century? The answer in many cases is an education in one of the "STEM" fields: science, technology, engineering and math. Despite the importance of an education in these fields, most women in developing countries have limited access to information and communication technology, according to a report by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

USAID is working in the Philippines to ensure that more women and girls have access to technology education. The Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM) Phase III project, funded by USAID, for example, aims to accelerate economic growth through programs such as computer literacy training in the southern Philippines. More than 700,000 secondary school students — the majority girls — and more than 20,000 teachers have benefitted from computer literacy and Internet training.

Under the USAID/Philippines Education, Quality and Access for Learning and Livelihood Skills-2 (EQuALLS2) project, 1,400 public primary school teachers from high poverty and conflict-affected areas in Mindanao received training in basic computer literacy. In addition, 350 teachers received training in intermediate computer literacy. Of the teachers, 79 percent were women with minimal or no prior exposure to technology.

Maria Dulce Mayordomo was one of those teachers. Mayordomo, who worked overseas as a nanny for three years to help put her younger sister through college, is now a science teacher at Tuyan Elementary School in Malapatan, Sarangani province. She received training through the EQuALLS2 project and is now using technology to teach her students and co-teachers to improve their lives. With the continuing exodus of Filipino skilled workers, especially teachers, to other countries for higher wages, Mayordomo, despite earning less money, is glad to be back in the Philippines.

As an exemplary participant in the EQuALLS2 project, she received a laptop on behalf of her school. Mayordomo uses the computer to create PowerPoint presentations that she uses to teach science. "The computer is a complete tool in classroom instruction. It has Encarta [a multimedia encyclopedia] and provides a wide range of references. My new skills help me to be a better teacher and my students are more motivated to learn," says Mayordomo.

Mayordomo also uses her computer skills to mentor two teachers, Marlem Ugalde and Rosannie Laruan. She meets with them to share student-centered teaching strategies, and they use the laptop to explore science lessons together. Mayordomo's new computer skills have also given her the confidence to pursue a master's degree. She was able to access the necessary information online to apply for a scholarship from the Philippines Department of Education and is currently working on her master's in science education at Mindanao State University in General Santos City.

Mayordomo is very grateful for the opportunities provided by USAID to help her grow professionally while staying close to home. She can attest to the fact that technology is improving the learning environment, for both teachers and students, in the southern Philippines. ■

Robert Burch is the chief of the Office of Education with USAID/Philippines in Manila.

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More than Building Schools

ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE SANITARY PADS CAN HELP KEEP GIRLS IN SCHOOL

By Nadia S. Ahmed

Courtesy of Sustainable Health Enterprises

The campaign Breaking the Silence on Menstruation, was launched in Kigali, Rwanda, in 2010.

How can countries encourage girls to attend school? Is the answer providing free textbooks or building schools closer to their homes? While these are important pieces of the puzzle, another issue influences whether girls attend school: menstruation.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund, one in 10 African girls stays home during menses or drops out of school. In many cases, girls do not have access to affordable sanitary pads, and social taboos against discussing menstruation compound the problem.

American entrepreneur Elizabeth Scharpf founded Sustainable Health Enterprises (SHE) in 2007 to address this problem. SHE works in Rwanda with its she28 campaign to develop an affordable and eco-friendly pad made from banana stem fibers so that girls can attend school unimpeded by worries over their menses. In the 2011 pilot project, SHE expects to produce 1,200 pads an hour, or about 2,112,000 pads per year. The goal is to reduce the price of pads by 35 percent to 70 percent, SHE Vice President CeCe Camacho explains.

Not only is SHE working to help girls attend school during menses, but also the group is taking a market-based approach to boost local businesses in Rwanda. SHE plans to sell its more-affordable pads to local entrepreneurs,

Courtesy of Sustainable Health Enterprises

Rwandan women strip banana stem fibers to be used to make more affordable menstrual pads.

focusing on women sellers. "Donations don't work long-term. Market-based approaches do, so why leave them for just the business world? Let's apply them to some of our biggest social problems," says Camacho.

Taking a comprehensive approach to social challenges is an important part of SHE's mission. At first, it was thought that what the girls needed was just an affordable pad. However, after talking to local girls, the SHE staff realized that the girls wanted health and hygiene education as well. In response, SHE has trained more than 50 community health and hygiene education workers, reaching some 5,000 Rwandans, according to Camacho. In addition, SHE has partnered with the Forum for African Women Educationalists, the Rwanda Association of University Women, the Rwanda Ministry of Education, the nongovernmental group Population Services International and youth centers to develop a health and hygiene curriculum for girls ages 12 and above, as well as for women and men.

SHE and its partners are also working to get people talking about affordable pads as a policy issue. In 2010, "SHE led a grass-roots advocacy campaign with 10 other leading organizations in Rwanda called Breaking the Silence on Menstruation," says Camacho. Hundreds of Rwandans marched across the capital and "engaged in a public discussion about how to break down these barriers to girls' education." As a result, the Rwandan government approved "a $35,000 procurement of menstrual pads for the poorest girls in Rwanda."

SHE's work in Rwanda shows that a comprehensive approach is needed to expand women and girls' educational opportunities. "Women and girls are often left behind because of some of these silent issues," Camacho explains. "We need to approach women and girls' education in a holistic way." A holistic approach, Camacho elaborates, also means being inclusive and culturally sensitive. It's important "to listen to the girls and the women as well as the fathers and the sons. It takes everyone to address these issues."■

*Nadia S. Ahmed is a managing editor of e*Journal USA.

Educating Girls, One Village at a Time

PROMOTING GIRLS' SCHOOL ENROLLMENT IN TURKEY

© UNICEF/SWZK00203/Sema Hosta

Students in southeastern Turkey gather at the start of the new school year.

In hundreds of villages in Turkey's Van province, in schools and homes and coffee houses, the same question has been asked by teachers, journalists, local activists and religious leaders.

"What will it take to get your daughter in school?"

The campaign, dubbed "Hey Girls, Let's Go to School," depends on a vast network of volunteers who go door to door to lobby parents on the value of education.

On a stop in Bakimli village, a remote outpost near the Iranian border, a team of four teachers checks a list of children and nods at a mud house where an 8-year-old girl is said to be out of school.

The woman who answers the door does not appear surprised at the group gathered on her front steps — in accordance with the campaign's closely monitored rules, volunteers visit each village regularly in order to assess progress and ensure that parents follow through when it comes time to register for school. With an air of resignation, she arranges chairs for the visitors almost before the first greetings are exchanged.

"My husband and brother are working in Istanbul," she says. "I'm afraid to stay home alone. And I don't think my daughter really needs to go to school."

Sukran Celik, a teacher from Van who works on the campaign in her spare time, nods sympathetically. "But isn't it hard for you to read instructions when you go places? If your daughter is educated, she can earn money and bring in a salary and care for her mother."

Twenty minutes later, the mother is wavering — won over by the force of Sukran's arguments, she still worries that education will spoil her daughter for marriage. It takes a visit from the village imam, Ibrahim Yasin, to persuade her that school will make her daughter a better mother someday.

Like many religious leaders in Turkey, the imam promotes girls' education during Friday prayers. "It is

a girl's right to go to school," he says. "A girl must be educated. Islam tells us this."

Above all, it is the connection between neighbors that seals the mother's decision to send her daughter to school. "I am a role model, because I am educated," says Sukran. "I am from Van; I am from this culture; I show them that this is what girls can be."

According to Zozan Ozgokce, the head of the Van Women's Association and another volunteer who visits local homes, there is a growing consensus that education is an imperative for every child.

"When we ask women how they want their children to live, they almost never say 'like me.' And when we ask the women what they want to be, they say 'educated.'

"It might take 25 years for the effects of this campaign to show," she says. "But the campaign will still be visible then — because it is this generation that will show how the world can be." ■

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The Girls Education Campaign (HKO)

By Dr. Nur Otaran and Fatma Özdemir Uluç

Dr. Nur Otaran is a researcher and consultant with UNICEF Turkey on education for girls, and Fatma Özdemir Uluç is an education officer with UNICEF Turkey.

© Mark Downey/Lucid Images/Corbis

The HKO campaign in Turkey encourages families to send their daughters to school.

Since 1997, all children in Turkey are required to complete eight years of free primary education. Despite these laws, Turkey has experienced gender disparity in education. In 2003, Turkey's branch of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Turkey's Ministry of National Education (MONE) established the Girls' Education Campaign (HKO), which ran until 2010. HKO addressed the main obstacles to school attendance for girls in Turkey: a lack of schools, gender discrimination, low expectations from education, low quality of education and the cost to families for sending children to school.

HKO started first in 10 provinces that had the highest illiteracy rates. It later expanded to all 81 of Turkey's provinces. To ensure effective implementation, partnerships at central and local levels were established. A conditional cash-transfer scheme was launched in 2003 to help parents cover the costs of sending their children to school, and free textbooks were provided to every child in primary education, encouraging parents to send their girls (as well as boys) to school.

HKO has contributed to improving the gender parity in primary education in Turkey. While the disparity between schooling rates of girls and boys was 7.15 percent in 2003, the year the campaign was first launched, this disparity dropped down to 1.02 percent between 2008 and 2009. Thanks to the campaign, more than 200,000 girls have enrolled in primary school. Turkey today is in a better position in terms of gender parity in primary education and it has a better system for monitoring school enrollment and attendance. ■

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Inspiring the Next Generation of Teachers

TAJIK TEACHER EXPLAINS IMPORTANCE OF FEMALE EDUCATORS

Courtesy of Zebo Murodova

Zebo Murodova was inspired by her mother to become a teacher, and now Zebo inspires her own students to pursue their education and careers.

Question: Did you encounter any obstacles in becoming a teacher?

Murodova: My mom is a teacher [and] she insisted [to] my father that "I will educate my girls because I want that they become somebody in life and they find their way." But my father … disagreed with it and he said, "Why a girl should study? We will either marry them and they will go leave our house."

But my mom did very a good job: She persuaded my father. So my father now says, "I am very proud of you, and it's good that I listened to your mother. Now you have your own profession."

Q: What challenges have you faced as a teacher?

A: I wanted [my girl students to] stay longer at school and learn some leadership skills. But their parents were not pleased with it, and they didn't allow the girls to come to [school] clubs.

Q: Were you able to change their minds?

A: Yes, I did, but only at my fifth and sixth years teaching, when I [became] like a model for them. When I began my trips, like two times I was in [the United States], everyone [saw] if you can have knowledge, it can take you everywhere. So it changed their minds. And they wanted to bring the girls by hand to my classroom and say, "Please, teach her."

Q: What effect do you think you have had on your students, particularly the girls?

A: I think that I become a role model for them. I can inspire them that they can achieve if they will learn. Recently, a parent came to me and said, "I want my

daughter [to] be like you. And all other daughters, I married them, but my last daughter, I don't want to marry her. I just want that she study and go abroad and see the world and meet different people." I become very happy to hear such words. I hope that my students — especially girls — will find their own way in life and also become educated. And I hope that in [the] future our girls will be very educated, and will work in all spheres to develop our country.

Q: Do you like being a teacher?

A: I am very happy that I chose this profession. This is a very noble profession. We are changing people's lives and we are putting students on the right path. And I'm very happy that I am a very useful person. Thanks to my students, I have a lot of achievements with the teacher's profession. I realized all my dreams.

I am very thankful to my mom; she struggled to educate her children. And I can say that it's very, very important that girls study, get education and have a profession. ■

Zebo Murodova is a secondary school English teacher in southern Tajikistan. Her mother is also an English teacher and encouraged her daughter to join the profession. Murodova studied education in university and then taught at an Internet learning center sponsored by the U.S. State Department and Relief International Schools Online. She also traveled to the United States as part of a teacher exchange program to further develop her teaching skills.

Read more from Zebo Murodova and watch an interview as she and her mother discuss the importance of education (in "A Passion for Education") at http://www.america.gov/dreams.html.

The opinions expressed in this interview do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.

A Down Payment on a Brighter Future

STIPENDS KEEP MORE BANGLADESHIS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

By Dr. Mohammad Niaz Asadullah

Courtesy of Shehzad Noorani/World Bank

A USAID program provides stipends to keep girls enrolled in secondary school.

In the 1980s, the U.S. Agency for International Development funded the Female Education Scholarship Program (FESP) to encourage girls to attend secondary school. Following the FESP, multiple iterations of the Female Secondary School Assistance Program (FSSAP) in Bangladesh have continued the work of increasing female enrollment. These stipend programs have inspired other gender-targeted monetary interventions in the developing world, such as in Pakistan.

Stipends were given to girls irrespective of household wealth to cover school fees and came with three conditions the girls had to meet: attend school for at least 75 percent of the school year, obtain at least 45 percent marks on average in final examinations, and remain unmarried through completion of secondary education.

The gender-targeted school subsidy scheme was launched nationwide in the early 1990s in all of the country's subdistricts by the Bangladeshi government in partnership with four international donors, including the World Bank. The FSSAP paid girls' tuition directly to the school for all secondary school female students attending grades 6–10 in formally registered rural schools (both nonreligious and religious schools).

The FSSAP both encouraged parents to send their daughters to secondary school and motivated schools to seek female students. The FSSAP also provided additional funding to all registered secondary schools, including registered Islamic schools (madrassas), depending on the number of female students enrolled. While rigorous impact evaluation of FSSAP has been difficult, the program is associated with an exponential increase in female enrollment, reversing the gender gap in secondary

Courtesy of Shehzad Noorani/World Bank

By providing money to families to cover school fees, the Female Secondary School Assistance Program in Bangladesh has led to an increase in girls' secondary school enrollment.

education in Bangladesh. Between 1990 and 2008, the share of female students in registered secondary schools in Bangladesh rose from 34 percent to 54 percent.

The FSSAP also led to a dramatic increase in female enrollment in madrassas and transformed the country's registered Islamic school system from a predominantly all-male institution to a largely co-educational system.

Furthermore, there was a decline in the number of female dropouts due to marriage in the post-intervention period. The delay in marriages induced by the stipend subsidy arguably contributed to lower fertility rates and child mortality rates in Bangladesh. Despite these gains in school participation and access, the rate of completion of the secondary school cycle remains low for girls.

Overall, the inclusion of girls within the secondary schooling system through the stipend subsidy has the potential to bring about a major social transformation, with direct implications for three of the Millennium Development Goals: reduce child mortality, improve maternal health and promote gender equality. A recent study by Asadullah and Chaudhury (2010) in Bangladesh indicates that school and madrassa teachers serve as a conduit for norm transmission to pupils, above and beyond the influence of their parents and the socio-economic environment. The institutional changes brought about by the FSSAP have been successful in improving access to education for girls in Bangladesh.

Despite these gains, as in other countries, more work needs to be done to ensure that the girls who participated in the FSSAP are able to continue to pursue their education beyond the secondary years. ■

Dr. Mohammad Niaz Asadullah is a lecturer in economics at the University of Reading in the United Kingdom and a visiting researcher at the ESRC Centre at the University of Oxford.

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Additional Resources

Books, Reports and Websites on Educating Women and Girls

Books and Reports

"Education from a Gender Equality Perspective." Washington, D.C.: USAID's Office of Women in Development, EQUATE Project, 2008.

Herz, Barbara and Gene B. Sperling. "What Works in Girls' Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World." Washington, D.C.: Council on Foreign Relations, 2004.

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Websites

Camfed International
http://us.camfed.org/site/

Room to Read, Girls' Education
http://www.roomtoread.org/page.aspx?pid=284

United Nations Children's Fund
http://www.unicef.org/

United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
http://www.ungei.org/

United Nations special rapporteur on the right to education
http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/education/rapporteur/index.htm

U.S. Department of State, Office of Global Women's Issues
http://www.state.gov/s/gwi/index.htm

U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/wid/

Vital Voices
http://www.vitalvoices.org/

World Bank, Girls' Education
http://bit.ly/kgQzBK

The U.S. Department of State assumes no responsibility for the content and availability of the resources listed above. All Internet links were active as of June 2011.

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