

World Education Forum

Dakar, Senegal
26-28 April 2000

Education for All
2000 Assessment



T H E M A T I C S T U D I E S

Girls' Education



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'The most urgent priority is to ensure access to, and improve the quality of, education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation.'

*Article 3, World Declaration
on Education for All*

Co-ordinated by the United Nations Children's Fund

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Girls' Education

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Executive summary

Ten years ago in the drive to promote Education for All, the world committed to focusing on girls, the largest population excluded from receiving a basic education. The level of awareness of girls' education has grown significantly, due partially to advocacy, beginning at community level and continuing to the level of international agencies. Over the decade, there have been great improvements in some areas and, unfortunately, reversals in others. Many things have been tried, and much is known about what works and what does not in educating girls. New challenges have emerged over the decade. We know that all children have the right to acquire a quality basic education, and realistic plans and targets can be set up to attain this objective. During the first decade of the new millennium, stakeholders at all levels (from government policy makers to local school committees, teachers, communities, families, and the girls themselves) need to mobilize resources and get all girls into school and make it possible for them to complete a basic education. It can be done. It must be done.

This Thematic Study sets out to describe what has been accomplished since the historic World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, outlines the major trends, presents the major lessons learned, identifies emerging issues, and proposes priorities for the next 10 to 15 years.

Progress

Since 1990, there has been general acceptance of the critical importance of education for human development, and of the key role played by girls' education in a development context. From a human rights perspective, girls' education must remain a priority, because girls still constitute almost two-thirds of the children excluded from a basic education. The acceptance of this priority has led to commitments in a number of countries around the world, and to substantial progress in identifying obstacles to girls' education and in understanding how to overcome them.

Over the decade, several countries in the Middle East region have demonstrated that getting girls into school is quite possible, and data from other regions show some encouraging gains. The largest number of girls not attaining their right to a basic education remain in Southern Asia. Sub-Saharan Africa still presents the greatest challenge, because the gender gap is so wide and because population growth rates remain high, and this places further strains on the school places available. At the same time, sub-Saharan Africa has also demonstrated its willingness to try new initiatives and innovations specifically directed at attracting girls to school and keeping them there. Worldwide, discrimination on the basis of gender remains a problem, and the focus on girls' education from a gender perspective has raised important questions about the education of boys as well.

There have also been some disappointments in the struggle for gender equality in education since Jomtien. In some cases, investments in girls' education have paradoxically increased, rather than decreased, the gender gap. In other cases, consistent gains have been halted, or even reversed, due to negative conditions in the environment outside of the education system. Data gaps make it difficult to accurately assess what is happening to girls in the difficult economic circumstances in parts of Eastern and Central Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Similarly, data on the extent of the impact of conflict and external stress on the education of girls in approximately fifty affected countries are difficult to obtain.

Lessons learned

Most important are the lessons that the decade has given the world. The thoughtful and careful application of these lessons on a situation-by-situation basis will make it possible to accelerate girls' education so that the target of Education for All can be met within 15 years. There are in fact a great many lessons; we present them here in six general categories in the interest of concision.

First, girls' education is more than an educational issue. It is deeply influenced by phenomena like poverty, tradition, habit, legal systems, and discrimination – all requiring **political will**, not just to educate girls, but also to eliminate those non-education obstacles. Second, the evidence is clear: strong and committed **leadership at every level** is essential to put the changes into place that are required to make girls' education a possibility; it will be necessary to maintain the momentum to make this a reality. Third, to be effective, leaders must be shown, with sufficient evidence at hand, that the change they are supporting is in the overall best interests of those they are serving. Thus, it becomes important to have **supportive fora** for sharing information and for advocacy. And fourth, to accomplish this, up-to-date and practical information derived from an ongoing and serious **research** base that also supports the refinement of existing education data bases will be necessary.

These first four categories of lessons are, perhaps, somewhat self-evident. The other two essential areas are less obvious. It is clear that for sustainability and to address issues of quality, equivalence, and demand, it is essential to take a **systemic approach** to reforms so that girls are no longer excluded. Finally, only **extended and expanded partnerships** can coherently combine all of these elements to facilitate the kinds of change that are required to get all girls into a basic education of good quality. It is these new and creative partnerships that have brought the necessary dynamism into education systems, defined broadly, and enabled them to expand and reach out to include girls.

Within each of these categories there is a wide range of strategies and approaches that have been tried. They are not all equally effective, and it is clear that some are more applicable within specific contexts than others. There have also been some difficult lessons to learn – for example, discovery that

some of the approaches that were believed to be simple and easily adapted to a wide range of environments are, in fact, quite limited.

New challenges

Since the Jomtien conference much has changed and, as a result, new questions and issues have emerged. The Thematic Study selects some of these and shows how they create new and nuanced challenges in the new millennium. Certainly the focus on girls' education from a gender perspective has raised many important issues about boys' education, and it is fully recognized that a **gender-sensitive education** is one of the things that will make the vision of Education for All a reality. Similarly, the evolution over the decade in girls' education and, in particular, attempts to better understand the gender gap, have resulted in a much better understanding of **exclusion** – from school, but also in the classroom, even for many who are already in school but who are excluded from effective learning. This work, often pioneered by a focus on girls, can make it possible to adapt what is known to include other excluded and marginalized groups – one of which consists of **adolescents**, and there are others.

The **HIV/AIDS** pandemic is presenting unexpected challenges of enormous proportions. Girls are disproportionately negatively affected, whether they are infected or not. Immediate and concerted effort is essential, or more than 10 years' of hard-won gains in girls' education will be eliminated in just a few years.

It is very apparent from the work in girls' education that the access to and quality of education are inextricably linked – it would be easier if this were not the case. This relates very closely to two other critical aspects of girls' (and boys') education: the need to understand both supply and demand and how these play out, one against the other. Everybody agrees that quality is important, but the experience of and challenge arising from girls' education is that the very **notion of quality must change** in some very fundamental ways. A quality education includes learning the basics and learning how to learn in a safe, secure, gender-sensitive, healthy, and protective learning environment. This finding is an enormous challenge for those educational systems in which it is difficult to offer basic education that meets a conventional definition of quality.

New research is revealing that the processes that accompany **globalization** are capable of increasing disparity and on a tremendous scale. This is particularly alarming, because women already compose the majority of the poor, and globalization could exacerbate this situation. In the face of this challenge and to break the cycle of women's poverty, girls' education has to be given new priority. On the other hand, the promise of the potential inherent in the new **information and communication technologies** could make an enormous difference in alleviating unfair disparities. A paradoxical challenge for girls' education is deeply embedded in this possibility, however. There is

growing evidence that girls and women are less likely to benefit from these new technologies than boys and men.

A challenge not frequently discussed but which is becoming more obvious is a worldwide movement in support of religious **fundamentalism**, frequently with a concomitant decrease in the rights and empowerment of girls and women. The links of fundamentalism to patriarchy and their implications for educational change deserve more attention if girls' education is to move ahead at an accelerated pace.

To fully grasp these challenges and monitor how they are going to affect girls' education will require more robust data that extend beyond the conventional education statistics. **Dis-aggregated data** will also be necessary, so that the nature of challenges can be properly understood.

Priorities

It is not possible to address every issue simultaneously. Priorities have to be set: some can be established globally, but good analysis at local and national levels will be essential in determining how best to overcome the barriers to girls' education in a particular context, and in what order. Simple **access** to any kind of basic education remains a major issue for millions of children, the majority of them girls.

Careful and strategic application of the lessons learned to **close the gender gap** and **address educational quality** are essential if *all* are to receive a quality basic education. There is no single intervention that will work everywhere – each context is different, and efforts must be made to adapt what is known to the particular and nuanced circumstances working against girls' education. Moreover, efforts in support of girls' education must now move from what have been limited efforts to **efforts on a massive scale**. This presents enormous challenges worldwide, but without such an acceleration, the majority of excluded girls will remain excluded from education – and from much more for the foreseeable future.

To make this extra effort, to accelerate progress, will require **ingenuity, persistence**, ongoing fostering of **new partnerships**, and significant **resource mobilization and utilization**. There are probably fewer 'lessons learned' in girls' education with regard to resource mobilization than in any of the other areas selected for discussion. Yet, this topic may present one of the greatest remaining challenges. It is hard to reach the girls who must be included (poor, with disabilities, affected by conflict or HIV/AIDS, engaged in child labour, for example), and it is likely to take more resources per child to reach them than it took to reach those who were already in school.

To reach the goal of Education for All, girls must be included – without this the world will have failed to deliver on the promise of a basic education for all. Girls can be included. It is possible. We can, we must, achieve this goal.

Education For All 2000 Assessment Thematic Paper: Girls' Education¹

Introduction

Rationale

In March 1990, 1,500 participants from 155 governments, 20 intergovernmental bodies and 140 non-governmental organizations met at the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, moved by a common concern for the global condition of education. They were seized by the imperative to make a fresh start and a new commitment to fulfilling the goal of education for all – especially for girls.

Three ground-breaking emphases in the drive for universal access to quality education emerged from the conference: (1) adult literacy as a key in extending efforts to provide educational for children; (2) the recognition that girls and women constituted the majority of the unschooled in almost every region of the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia; and (3) an expanded vision of education as a lifelong process of learning that includes, but is not limited to, schooling.

Participants made a global commitment at Jomtien to 'ensure access to, and improve the quality of, education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation' (Article 3, WDEFA). Every country, organization and agency dedicated itself to achieving this goal. Getting girls into school and ensuring that they benefited from the experience in a supportive, enabling environment was identified as critical to achieving education for all.

This decade has seen some of the greatest strides ever for women and children. However, as participants at the mid-decade EFA review in Amman, Jordan acknowledged, gender inequalities in education 'is an area where in most regions of the world, [the] least progress has been made...'.² Gender equity in education was reaffirmed as a priority for action.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, formulated in 1989, claimed the right to a quality education for all girls and boys. Article 28 states that education is a right which must be achieved 'on the basis of equal opportunity'.³ *From a human rights perspective, girls' education must remain a top priority, since girls still constitute almost two-thirds of the children excluded from a basic education.* Education for girls means that

as women they will be able to exercise their rights to participate in political and economic decision-making in the community as well as in the household; that they will be able to participate in development efforts in both the household and the community.

'Educating girls has benefits at the personal, community and social levels that make it one of the most important investments that any developing country can make.'⁴ Several decades of research have demonstrated that educated girls become more effective mothers who have higher survival rates among their children because they have better nutrition and health practices. Educated women are more likely to enter the formal labour market, earn higher wages and thus contribute more directly to a nation's economic productivity. There is also an intergenerational impact in that the daughters and sons of educated women are more likely to be educated and thus carry the benefits into succeeding generations. A recent review and analysis that aimed to 'identify the main elements of successful country performance in human development' concluded that *the one 'seemingly necessary condition is a high female (primary) enrolment ratio'*.⁵

Since many countries dedicate significant proportions of their national budgets to supporting their education systems, stakeholders at all levels should work to ensure that education systems are effective and efficient. Education systems should provide quality education to both boys and girls, teaching them in a cost-effective manner what they need to know for life in the twenty-first century. When a significant proportion of the population is not obtaining these benefits – as is the case in most regions of the world – all stakeholders need to review the system's functioning to ensure that the funding dedicated to this sector is being well spent. *Targeting girls' and women's education is a key strategy for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of school systems.* Not only girls benefit from this focus. One of the clearest lessons from activities of the past decade is that boys also benefit from efforts to promote the participation of girls, in enrolment and even in achievement.

Background

The participants at the Jomtien conference faced the reality that the gender gap in primary school enrolment ratios had not diminished despite a significant expansion of education in the least developed countries.⁶ After girls entered school, they often dropped out earlier than boys. Circumstances needed to be more favourable to permit girls' retention within the system. Schools had to be cheaper, better and closer to home to attain universal access for girls, especially in the poorest countries and the regions of Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. While other regions had reached universal access or were close to it at the primary level, in many countries differentials between girls and boys still persisted at the secondary and tertiary levels in many countries. Further, the data from higher educational

levels in almost all regions revealed that girls studied mathematics and science and entered the more technological careers at far lower rates than boys.

Beyond issues of access and subject choice, the school experience itself was significantly different for girls than for boys. The hidden curriculum in teaching materials, notably textbooks, and the attitudes of teachers, administrators, and other pupils conveyed the message to girls that they were inferior to boys and should have lower aspirations for themselves. There was a strong suspicion that these negative attitudes and experiences were being reflected in the generally low attainment and achievement levels for girls as compared to boys. These and other factors led participants to the conclusion that many education systems are systematically biased against girls.

Some populations were more likely to have low schooling rates. For example, poorer communities, those isolated by geographic or cultural barriers, or those belonging to religious or ethnic minorities, were much more likely to enrol fewer children, especially girls. Governments and societies were excluding significant portions of their population. Participants at Jomtien adopted a Framework for Action as the guiding document to achieve education for girls and all excluded populations by the end of the decade.

Scope of study

The WCEFA Framework for Action designed the following targets and objectives for girls' education: (1) universal access to and completion of basic education by the year 2000, keeping in mind that basic education refers to primary education or whatever higher level of education is considered in a given country as 'basic'; and (b) reduction of the adult literacy rate to one-half of the 1990 level by the year 2000, with sufficient emphasis on female literacy to significantly reduce the current disparity between male and female illiteracy rates.

Ten years later, the convening partners commissioned a series of thematic studies to examine the progress that has been made in reaching those goals. This thematic study on girls' education, in keeping with the general EFA 2000 assessment, is global in scope and covers girls in basic education. The focus is on developing countries, but the developed countries are also

mentioned. While some clear differences between regions exist, these are in degree and not in kind, and a global analysis is therefore appropriate. Female literacy rates are addressed in places where they emphasize the critical need for girls' education.

The parameters for analysing girls' education may be listed as follows.

- *Access.* Are girls and women physically, culturally and legally able to access educational services? How are the needs of the excluded addressed?
- *Achievement.* Do girls and women within educational institutions learn as much as boys and do they demonstrate similar achievement patterns in their learning through standard assessment measures?
- *Attainment.* To what extent do girls and women progress toward secondary, technical and tertiary levels?
- *Completion.* Having attained a certain level of education, what percentage of girls and women are able to complete it?
- *Dropping out of school.* At what stage and in what proportion do girls and women drop out of educational systems?

Teaching practices, curriculum, teacher and community attitudes, cultural practices, and state policies help to explain the parameters in their contextual perspective. Lessons learned from the 1990s offer insights into the challenges to be addressed in this new century.

The study is based on a review of EFA country reports,⁷ the review of documents provided by the convening partners and other agencies interested in promoting the education of girls and women; individual interviews (in person, over the phone and via e-mail) with knowledgeable informants; and the authors' backgrounds in this area.

A word of caution is needed here. A problem still exists with educational statistics. The international databases tend to be several years behind, and there is little consistency between editions of such sources as the UNESCO Statistical Yearbooks. This report relies on the most recent data available, which has generally incorporated corrections for earlier periods. Therefore, the level of enrolments reported for 1990 is not based on data that was available in 1990, but rather on data contained in the most recent UNESCO database (September, 1999). ■

The status of girls' education

Progress over the decade

This section provides a global overview addressing enrolment growth and the gender gap, followed by regional summaries. The information presented here is gleaned from country EFA assessments as they became available. Because assessments were by necessity not carried out identically, comparable information was often not available across countries.

Net enrolment ratios (NER) have risen in some countries in all regions of the world.⁸ While in developed countries net enrolment rates were already universal or close to it in 1990, the average level of NER in the developing countries was 85.6 per cent for boys and 77.2 per cent for girls. The levels were projected to be 87.9 per cent for boys and 81.5 per cent for girls in 2000.

Primary net enrolment ratios for primary school girls have risen in all regions since 1990 and are projected to increase further up to 2010. This also means that the absolute number of girls in school has risen in all regions since 1990 and is projected to increase further up to 2010. However, because of population growth and the tendency for less progress to have been made in the areas with higher growth, the absolute number of girls of primary age (worldwide) out of school has risen since 1990 and is expected to continue rising up to 2005.

Enrolment growth

Net enrolment ratios have grown overall, and girls' enrolment ratios have grown substantially over the past decade. As Table 1 indicates, girls' enrolment has grown more than boys' in all regions of the developing world, particularly in East Asia and the Arab States. However, the growth has not been 'accelerated' and girls are still less likely to be in school than boys.

Table 1. Percentage growth in net enrolment ratios, 1990–2000, by gender

Region	Primary		Secondary	
	M	F	M	F
Developing Countries	2.7	5.6	13.4	24.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	6.2	5.9	13.9	16.8
Arab States	-1.1	6.0	10.2	24.8
Latin America/Caribbean	7.5	7.0	16.6	16.8
East Asia	0.9	3.4	12.4	38.9
Southern Asia	4.8	13.4	7.4	18.5

In the Arab States, there appears to have been a contraction in the net enrolment rates of boys at the primary level at the same time that there has been an increase at the secondary level. The reasons for this are unknown and have caused some concern. Girls' enrolment levels at primary level have increased at above average rates and there has been significant growth for females at secondary level within the region.

In all regions, the ratios for the secondary level have increased more than the ratios for the primary level. Without a more in-depth analysis, it is impossible to state precisely the reasons for this. The expansion of the more expensive secondary level may indicate that the more affluent members of society are disproportionately enrolling their children in secondary school. Another explanation could be that the different starting levels explain the higher growth rates at secondary level; the primary level would be more constrained by ceiling effects. Since the primary level enrolment is higher to start with, an increase of a given size would form a smaller proportion of the enrolment.

Gender gap

It is sometimes argued that if the general trend to get more girls into school is succeeding, then one should not worry unduly about whether the gender gap is narrowing or widening. However, it matters because its presence reflects why the differentials exist in the first place. *A persistent gender gap strongly suggests that the underlying causes of disadvantage and discrimination against women and girls are not being meaningfully addressed.*

Worldwide, the gender gap in enrolment ratios is closing. However, this overall figure masks considerable regional variation in both the starting level and the degree of improvement. As can be seen in Table 2, in 1990 Southern Asia and the Arab States had the highest gender differentials (17 and 12 percentage points respectively). Both regions have narrowed this differential by approximately 5 percentage points. Sub-Saharan Africa was the third highest in terms of gender gap, but despite the fact that net enrolment ratios for both boys and girls have risen, the gender gap has widened by 0.7 percentage points in this part of the world.

Table 2. Primary net adjusted enrolment ratios

Region	1990			2000		
	M	F	Gap	M	F	Gap
Developing countries	85.6	77.2	8.4	87.9	81.5	6.4
Sub-Saharan Africa	62.7	54.1	8.6	66.6	57.3	9.3
Arab States	84.7	72.8	11.9	83.8	77.2	6.6
Latin America/Caribbean	88.4	87.1	1.3	95.0	93.2	1.8
East Asia/Oceania	98.2	95.4	2.8	99.1	99.0	0.9
Southern Asia	81.5	64.3	17.2	85.4	72.9	12.5

In Latin America and the Caribbean, net enrolment ratios in 1990 were high, and these have improved for both genders. However, the gender gap in Latin America, which was the smallest in 1990, has widened by 0.5 percentage points and is now greater than that of East Asia/Oceania. Such a small increase is probably not statistically significant, but it should be a reminder that it is possible to move backwards in the struggle for gender equity in education.

The East Asia/Oceania region is notable not only for reaching near universality between boys and girls at the primary level, but also for reducing its gender differential to less than 1 per cent at the same time.

Table 3. Secondary net adjusted enrolment ratio

Region	1990			2000		
	M	F	Gap	M	F	Gap
Developing countries	58.3	43.7	14.6	66.1	54.3	11.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	45.1	33.3	11.8	51.4	38.9	12.5
Arab States	60.6	46.8	13.8	66.8	58.4	8.4
Latin America/Caribbean	59.1	58.9	0.2	68.9	68.8	0.1
East Asia/Oceania	58.5	47.6	10.9	70.9	66.1	4.8
Southern Asia	61.0	38.4	22.6	65.5	45.5	20

There have been similar overall improvements in the gender gap at the secondary level (Table 3). East Asia/Oceania has succeeded in reducing the size of the gender gap by six percentage points, more than half of the original difference. The Arab States have also made good progress with a reduction of more than 5 percentage points in their gender gap. Although secondary net enrolment ratios have increased in sub-Saharan Africa, there has been little change in the gender gap in this region. The increase in the gender gap in sub-Saharan Africa has even caused a change in its relative position. In 1990, sub-Saharan Africa had the third highest gender gap, behind Southern Asia and the Arab states, but in the year 2000 only Southern Asia will have a higher gender gap at the secondary level.

Gender parity at all levels and in all types of education is a goal for universal basic education. *However, if countries are characterized by gender parity this does not necessarily mean that equitable conditions exist for girls and boys in school; neither does gender bias in favour of girls (as in Botswana, the Philippines, Lesotho and countries in the Caribbean) indicate that conditions have become inequitable for boys.* The qualitative aspects of schooling are important factors: these may include leadership opportunities for girls in the classroom and school; equal access to resources, including the teacher's time and attention; parents' and teachers' attitudes toward girls' aspirations and education; and the respect teachers and other students accord to girls (and boys). All of these elements affect the quality and equity of pupils' school experiences. Indicators of

these qualitative factors have yet to be consistently developed, but descriptive information (less easily quantified) is also needed to point to gender equity in a school or an education system. These kinds of data are valuable and necessary, and need to be considered in future assessments.

Due to economic constraints, the data presented above, in general, have been geographically aggregated. Urban and rural populations, as well as populations reflecting different traditions or religions, those living in remote mountain villages as well as those living in exclusive urban suburbs, have all been summed together. This aggregation frequently obscures radical differences, not only in actual levels of educational participation, but also in the constraints to participation and the kinds of strategies that can be used to address them. This is true for small countries, but is even more acute in large countries where remote and/or minority populations may have rates of female and male educational participation that are strikingly different from the norm. Muslim populations in countries where Christian populations are in the majority (or vice versa), nomadic groups, or other minority groups might just as well, for all intents and purposes, be living in a completely different country. The growth of the urban under-class living in slums and squatter settlements on the fringes of large urban areas in most developing countries is a notable development of the 1990s. Girls and boys in these communities are very unlikely to attend school.

Some of the variations within regions and within countries are discussed below. Closing the gender gap must remain an important objective within the Education for All movement, in light of regional variation, and the fact that some regions and nations are not making any progress in this area.

Regional profiles

The disadvantaged position of girls within the education sector is revealed through limited access; lower rates of representation at particular levels; rates of completion; and rates of achievement (how well they do in learning assessment exercises). In addition, girls' representation in 'higher status' areas of study, the kinds of careers that they are able to enter, and in which careers they can advance are other indicators of the relative position of girls within the system. The supportive factors that encourage girls to succeed include, *inter alia*, literate women (including and especially literate mothers) and the presence and number of women in the teaching force. The profiles presented below take these factors into account as they reveal trends across the geographical regions of the world.

Eastern Asia and Oceania. Primary net enrolment rates have been increasing in all countries, although much variation exists in this broad region. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Cook Islands have achieved universal access to primary education. China, Indonesia, Fiji, Samoa, Thailand, and Malaysia are close to that goal. Other countries such as

Cambodia and Viet Nam are making steady progress. Countries such as Malaysia, the Philippines, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea show gender parity in achievement as well as in access. In China, absolute gender disparity in net enrolment ratios narrowed from 1.80 per cent to 0.14 per cent, indicating that disparity in access between girls and boys has basically been eliminated.

On the other hand, there is a large gender imbalance in schools in Papua New Guinea. Cultural attitudes militate in a very significant way against girls' education; approximately 10–15 per cent more boys than girls entered first grade between 1992 and 1997. If young women do complete an education, the labour market provides few opportunities for them to be employed in supervisory and management positions.

In some of the countries where important gains have been made, there are still pockets of marginalized children that are hard to reach – those belonging to ethnic or religious minorities or living in geographically remote regions. In these communities girls are particularly vulnerable to being left out of school.⁹ For example, in Lao People's Democratic Republic, the gender balance of student enrolment nationally is 45 per cent girls and 55 per cent boys, but gender differences in primary school are even more prevalent in provinces with a high ethnic minority population. In one region, boys have a 114.7 per cent gross enrolment ratio, compared with 76.2 per cent for females; in another, 75 per cent of the non-enrolled children are girls.

The economic slump in this part of the world, and the growing tendency for the state to partially or completely withdraw even primary education from funding is forcing parents to decide whether or not to send their daughters to school for financial reasons, and the result does not generally favour girls.¹⁰

The situation for the region at the secondary level is less positive than for the large numbers of primary school children in the East Asia/Oceania region. Not only are overall rates of participation lower, but the gender gap is also wider – 13 percentage points in favour of boys in Cambodia, 12 in Lao People's Democratic Republic, and 9 in China and Indonesia.¹¹ Mongolia is an exception with a 20 percentage point gap in favour of girls. In Indonesia the transition rate for boys is increasing (currently 74.5 per cent), but the girls' transition rate has dropped dramatically from 74 per cent (1992) to an expected 56 per cent in 2000 – below the 1990 rate of 57.7 per cent.

Literacy rates vary widely between and within countries as well. Gender disparity in illiteracy rates in China has narrowed by 6.3 per cent, yet regional disparities remain significant. Relative gender gaps in illiteracy rates have increased in 17 provinces and autonomous regions. Adult illiteracy rates in Qinghai and Tibet are as high as 43.6 per cent and 54.1 per cent respectively; gender disparities in these areas are even more striking. In Vietnam, there is an 8 percentage point gender gap in literacy rates for the 15–35-year-old age group, but

in the main labour force, literacy rates have increased from 86 per cent in 1990 to 95.6 per cent in 1998, with no gender gap registered. Papua New Guinea reports a low literacy rate for females at 38 per cent. There are more qualified women teachers than men in such countries as the Philippines, Kiribati, and the Cook Islands.

Southern Asia. In Southern Asia more than one-third of girls are unlikely to ever receive a formal education, and adult women have the lowest literacy rate in the world. There have been some signs of improvement, however, with girls' enrolment at the primary and secondary levels growing more rapidly than boys'.

Variations within and between countries are particularly obvious in this region. In 1999, all countries (except Maldives and Sri Lanka) were still classified in the World Bank low-income group with GNP per capita income of less than US\$675 per year. In Maldives, access to schooling is no longer an issue, but the quality of education is, especially for schools on the outer islands. Primary enrolment rates in Bangladesh have climbed to 75 per cent for both boys and girls. The total enrolment level for all children of school-going age in Bhutan is 95 per cent. Schooling rates for girls in Afghanistan have plummeted, however, following the closing of girls' schools. Within India, the state of Kerala has an enrolment rate of 90 per cent, while the rate for Bihar (due west of Bangladesh) is approximately 50 per cent.

Innovations to address these dramatic differences and low rates include a multi-sector partnership in the Indian city of Mumbai and the Intensive District Approach to Education for All (IDEAL) programme in Bangladesh. The Pratham Mumbai Education Initiative has set up 1,600 pre-schools and renovated 1,200 primary schools in Mumbai. IDEAL promotes more child-friendly classrooms by training teachers about children's individual learning patterns. Also in India, the state of Andhra Pradesh conducted a 'Back-to-School' programme; that is, transition classes for working children and 16,000 summer schools for 360,000 children in Grade One. Nepal and Bangladesh have designed policies and programmes to bring more women teachers into schools as a means of providing security, safety and role models for their girl students.

Nepal's 1991 census showed a literacy rate of 25 per cent for girls aged six and over. The literacy rate for women of the 18 years and older age group was 18 per cent. Most of the illiteracy in Nepal is found in the rural population, and includes both adults and school-age children who can not attend school. In Bhutan, female literacy issues have not been sufficiently studied, but over 10,000 adults have been enrolled in non-formal education programmes, 70 per cent of whom are women.

Attention to girls' education in Southern Asia is an urgent priority. This region has the largest number of out-of-school children in the world, two thirds of whom are girls. Without concerted action in this region, EFA will never be achieved.

Central Asia and Eastern Europe. A tradition of generally equal access to education exists in all of the post-socialist countries of Central Asia and Eastern Europe. In many countries, gender equality is written into fundamental laws or the national constitution. Women made significant advances in education under socialist forms of government, and current statistics on gender parity in education in most of the region reflect this progress. Some nations in the region, such as Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, report universal primary education along with gender parity on indicators such as persistence and literacy.

The educational systems of most of the countries in this area are undergoing major changes, however. Most have suffered serious economic and social destabilization during the present transitional period. In the education sector, this has led to reduction in the availability of teaching materials, diminished purchasing power for teachers, and increased numbers of drop-outs. In Tajikistan, the number of drop-outs is increasing at all levels of education. Approximately 20 per cent of boys and 25 per cent of girls between 7 and 17 years old in rural areas did not attend school in 1996. The percentage of **female** students has fallen to almost one-third of the high school population and it is decreasing annually, as a result of material difficulties within the family, shrinking job opportunities for women, and educational priority being given to young men. Despite these grim statistics, the transition period in Central Asia has also allowed for some positive developments, such as policy reform and the introduction of new curricula and instruction methods.

Turkey's countrywide NER is 87.5 per cent total, but the rate for girls lags behind boys by 10.3 percentage points. In Romania, a 1994 study of the Institute for Sciences of Education on functional illiteracy showed that 11 per cent of the total functional illiterate group among graduates of compulsory education were girls, while boys represented only 8.9 percent. Girls in this group are at a particular disadvantage, since non-formal education is more available to the male population (courses are organized for young men by the national defence ministries during their military service, for example).

In some of the countries struggling the most to develop a new economic and social environment, the introduction of higher education fees has coincided with lower family incomes and sharp reductions in state support for education generally. In Bulgaria, for example, state funding fell by three quarters. In Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova and the former Republic of Macedonia, heating schools in winter has now become a problem.

A recent study conducted by UNICEF's International Child Development Centre suggests that not only are the standards of education and the enrolment levels falling, but that the egalitarian feature of the former system is also rapidly eroding. Ethnic and religious minorities and rural populations are being disproportionately affected, as are girls.

Western Europe. Nearly universal access to education has been achieved in Western Europe, with boys and girls equally represented in early childhood and primary education. Indeed, girls often achieve higher levels of education than boys. Persistent rates of high unemployment have plagued many parts of this region, however, so the focus of educational reform has centred on education for employment in information-based economies.

In many Western European countries, including Norway, high rates of illiteracy among minority and immigrant populations are of special concern. In Cyprus, overall illiteracy dropped from 6 per cent in 1991 to 4 per cent in 1997, and the women's illiteracy rate dropped from 10 per cent to 6 percent. In spite of the decrease in illiteracy in the female population, the percentage remains relatively high. This may be attributable to the fact that social conventions kept many older women, especially those in rural areas, from attending school.

One half of Ireland's population aged 25–64 years had not completed upper secondary education in 1996 compared to 62 per cent in 1989. The low relative ranking in this indicator reflects the low level of educational investment in Ireland up to thirty years ago. Women in this age group have more average years of schooling than men. However, the position improves for the younger age groups. One-third (34 percent) of Ireland's population aged 25–34 years had not completed upper secondary education in 1996, and among young people aged 20–24, the percentage declined by the equivalent of 12 percentage points (from 38 per cent to 26 percent) between 1989 to 1995.

In Finland, as in several other Western European countries, women have surpassed men in both enrolment and graduation rates, especially in tertiary education. Both education and employment continue to be divided into men's and women's fields, however, and have not become substantially less segregated over the past 20 years. In another example, vocational education in the Netherlands, only 11.5 per cent of girls were enrolled in technical courses in 1997/98, while 86.8 per cent were enrolled in non-technical fields of preparation. This represents only a slight change from 1990, when the figures were 10 per cent and 90 per cent respectively. Women in adult education, however, represented 63 per cent of all participants in 1997/98.

Women's participation in the work force has contributed to the growth of early childhood education in a number of countries. In Sweden, for example, the majority of children between 1 and 12 years old now have a place in publicly funded child-care centres. In Ireland, by contrast, education for children under 4 years old is not well developed, but nearly all 5-year-olds and more than half of 4-year-olds attend primary school. The participation rate among 4-year-old girls is four to five percentage points higher than that for boys.

In France, as in many other countries in Europe, the majority of teachers are women. In 1998, about 77 per cent of French teachers were women. In the Netherlands, the percentage of female teachers in primary education rose from 64 per cent in 1991 to 76.8 per cent in 1997, although at secondary level women accounted for only 25 per cent in 1993 and 28 per cent in 1997.

Arab States and North Africa. Early childhood care and development is receiving greater attention in this region, especially in Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq. Other countries like Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iran and Djibouti are moving in the same direction. Iran has made great strides in rural areas, and girls' attendance is now over 90 percent. In both Bahrain and Syria the gender parity index for early childhood care in pre-schools favours males, although the index for Syria has increased from .89 to .91.

Female primary net enrolments have improved except in Yemen, Djibouti and Mauritania, but girls in the 6–10 age group still have lower rates than boys (except in Jordan and Lebanon). The gap is widest in Yemen and Morocco. For the 11 to 15 year age group in the region, there has been an increase in the gender gap at primary level since 1995.¹² Egypt's primary education enrolment represents an increase in basic education of 12 per cent over a five-year period. With 55.4 per cent males and 44.6 per cent females, this also represents a slight increase in gender parity. Girls are still more likely to drop out or repeat in this region, although there are exceptions. In Iraq, repetition rates among males were higher than for females, but grade 4 achievement rates favoured males (57 percent) over females (43 percent). At the secondary level, male enrolment ratios still exceed that of females everywhere except Jordan.

Based on achievement data from nine countries, girls scored higher than boys in the area of life skills and Arabic language. The results for mathematics were mixed, with girls outscoring boys in Oman, Palestine, United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Kuwait.

Literacy rates vary widely. The rates are increasing in Bahrain but there is still a marked gender difference in the rates of 80.4 per cent for men and 73 per cent for women (according to population estimates of 1996). Iraq's literacy rate is 27.4 per cent for males and females ages 10 and older, 20 per cent for males and 34.5 per cent for females. In Syria, females' ability to read and write has risen strikingly from 60 per cent to 73 per cent over the past five years, an increase averaging 2.5 per cent per year.

Regional efforts are being undertaken to make the promotion of girls' education a regional imperative with the creation of the Regional Task Force on Girls' and Women's Education, made up of women leaders from Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Sudan, Yemen and Iran. However, the persistent conflicts in some countries (Algeria, Sudan, the West Bank) and the sanctions against Iraq have disrupted schooling, particularly for girls.

■ The Republic of Yemen: addressing gender disparities

The republic of Yemen faces special challenges in improving educational access, equity, and quality, since Yemen has one of the largest disparities in access in the world. In 1997, gross enrolment rates for boys and girls at the basic education level were 81 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively – a 42 percentage point difference. The government, with World Bank support, is actively working to improve girls' enrolment rates. Central to the country's efforts are initiatives to build more schools in under-served areas, including girls-only secondary schools; increase the number of qualified women teachers and school administrators in rural areas; engage parents in the management of schools; and improve the quality of education. The government is also actively seeking ways to reduce the direct and opportunity costs of girls' education, since these are known to be key factors underlying girls' low enrolment and retention rates. Ministry of Education initiatives to decentralize and to increase efficiencies in education administration will also promote girls' school participation by loosening up resources for system expansion and improvement.

Source: World Bank, *The World Bank and Girls' Education*.

Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite notable gains by African countries to ensure that every African child has access to quality basic education, only about 10 countries have achieved universal primary education. An estimated 41 million school age children are out of school, and 56 per cent of them are girls. Approximately 20 to 29 per cent repeat a grade or more, and the number of students dropping out of school is increasing.

Most sub-Saharan African countries have a gender gap that disadvantages girls. Chad's general enrolment increased by 14 per cent from 1996 to 1998 but the gender gap widened by six per cent from 1997 to 1998, after narrowing by two per cent in 1997. The gender gap remains at 26 per cent in both Chad and Benin.

Some countries in East and Central Africa experienced declining enrolments in the early- and mid-1990s (Kenya and Tanzania) but appear to be reversing this trend in the latter part of the decade. Swaziland had a large drop in net enrolment, decreasing from 93 to 80 per cent between 1993 and 1996, due in part to the serious impact of HIV/AIDS on Swaziland. The pandemic costs Swaziland's educational system an estimated three to four teachers each week.

Adolescent girls are increasingly being seen as a group vulnerable to educational disruption – there is a high demand for their labour in the household, and many girls are still being married in their mid-teens. For those outside marriage, their age and gender make them easy targets for sexual exploitation, and consequently they generally record the highest rates of HIV/AIDS infection.¹³ All of these factors: household labour, early marriage, unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases – threaten their schooling and will make them a priority target group for increased education over the next 10–15 years.

Sub-Saharan Africa had the second highest gender gap in 1990. Since then several regional initiatives have emerged; the Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE), the Female Education in Mathematics and Science in Africa (FEMSA), the NGO Alliance, the African Girls' Education Initiative (AGEI), and others. Advocacy and awareness-raising activities have brought about remarkable progress, and girls' enrolment has risen markedly in sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, despite excellent progress in some countries (Guinea, Benin and Senegal) there has been a slight overall widening of the gender gap.

Adult illiteracy, particularly among females, continues to grow, fuelled by high population growth and inadequate supply of educational services.

Latin America & Caribbean. Latin America has the highest literacy rates in the developing world – 87 per cent, with women's literacy at 85 per cent. Enrolment rates for girls and boys at primary and secondary levels are high throughout the region. Quality is an important issue, however. Gross enrolment rates are usually over 100, implying a large percentage of overage students as well as high levels of repetition. In nearly half of the 21 countries for which data is available, at least 10 per cent of the children are repeating grades. In Brazil the rate of repetition exceeds 15 per cent. Guatemala's repetition rate is 28.4 per cent nationally, ranging from 19 per cent in Guatemala City to 36 per cent in the department of Petén. The rates are slightly higher for boys than for girls.

Dropout rates are also high. One quarter of children entering primary school drop out before reaching the fifth grade. In Colombia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti and Nicaragua, the dropout rate is at least 40 per cent.¹⁴ In Bolivia, primary enrolment slightly favours girls, but only 42–54 per cent of girls or boys finish fifth grade. Girls' rate of promotion in primary is slightly higher and the dropout rate is slightly lower for girls than for boys. More significantly, 42 per cent of girls finish school, compared to a mere 35 per cent for boys.

Throughout Latin America, the enrolment levels are relatively lower and the gender gaps higher among certain parts of the population, particularly the indigenous Indians. Rural girls' dropout and repetition rates are twice as high as those of boys and the gender gap in primary completion is widest in rural areas.

Over the last two decades Brazil has experienced a rapid increase in the schooling of the female population. Net enrolment rates in primary education are high, graduation rates in primary education are going up, and more Brazilian females are also enrolled in secondary education. More important is the rapid decline of illiteracy rates among younger women. The proportion of illiterates is significantly lower now among women than among men in all population groups up to the age of 39. Among the reasons given for this situation are the

entry of women into the labour market and the increasing professionalization of the female work force, associated with higher aspirations for girls; and the reality that male children and adolescents are more often forced to leave school and work to increase the family income.

Latin America is also home to some of the most innovative educational initiatives, including community schools in Colombia (*Escuela Nueva*) and Guatemala (*Nueva Escuela Unitaria*) where girls actively participate in learning and have increased opportunities for leadership throughout primary school. New kinds of business and community partnerships support education in Brazil. And as Honduras recovers from the devastation of Hurricane Mitch, it has elected to restructure its education system, engaging in yet another innovation. Middle school education is being provided by radio to citizens throughout the country through partnerships with churches, private enterprise, donor partners, and NGOs.

North America. The United States has achieved education for all at the primary level and virtually all adults now have at least a primary education. However, not all students obtain a high school diploma. Among persons 25 to 34 years old, 87.9 per cent of females, but only 85.9 per cent of males, have completed secondary education.

As in most industrial countries, men and women in the United States persist in school at similar rates, though in recent years females have had a slight and growing edge. The event dropout rate for males in grades 10 to 12 rose from 4.0 to 5.0 between 1990 and 1997 and the rate for females rose from 3.9 to 4.1 during the same period.

Achievement presents a somewhat more complex picture, with girls doing better in reading and boys in mathematics and science, especially at advanced levels. Male students usually outscore female students in mathematics and science; in reading and writing female students tend to outperform males. In science, mathematics and reading, the gender gaps in 1996 were not significantly different from those in early 1970s. As in almost every other country, academic achievement in the United States correlates closely with socio-economic status, that is, children from higher socio-economic backgrounds score higher on measures of achievement. Other inequities relate to the racial and ethnic background of students, gender, geography, mother tongue, and immigrant status. For children with disabilities, legislation has required since the early 1970s they be provided with the sort of education that will enable them to develop their skills and knowledge to the fullest extent possible. Programmes at the national, state, and local levels support this policy for girls and for boys.

After Jomtien, the United States set a goal of reducing the adult illiteracy rate, especially the disparity between male and female rates. In the International Adult Literacy Survey initiated in 1994 by nine countries, approximately one-fifth of American

adults scored at or above level 4 on all three scales (only Sweden scored higher). However, a disproportionate number of adults scored at level 1 (only Poland had a greater percentage of adults scoring at this lowest literacy level). Further analysis of the American data showed a strong correlation between parental education and the literacy levels of youth.

Key aspects of the girls' education discourse

In addition to changes in enrolment trends and dropout rates, gender parity indices, and other indicators of quantitative change over the past decade, key aspects of the discourse on girls' education have also shifted.

International awareness of girls' education as an issue has increased significantly. Educators, politicians, donors, and others – especially from countries with significant gender differentials – are now much more likely to cite gender-specific data on enrolment, dropout, and achievement. Some countries have only recently begun to disaggregate data by gender and only a small minority of countries submitting EFA reports did not mention some aspect(s) of gender and education (e.g. gender parity in early childhood development, enrolment, repetition, completion, women teachers, women's literacy rates, gender-sensitive curriculum development).

Emphasis has also shifted from documenting barriers to engaging in **advocacy and action**. Practical aspects of girls' education issues have evolved from problem identification to moving into action. As a basis for advocacy and as a means of documenting girls' education issues early in the decade, it was often important for actors to 'discover' barriers and constraints to girls' education and to present the information to national

or regional workshops of policy makers. But the key issues rapidly turned into questions of programming and implementation: What strategies could be adopted? How could they be monitored and evaluated for impact?

The formation of **networks and partnerships** developed widely over the decade, as awareness has grown of the complexity of the issues and the importance of networks for women's empowerment and for basic questions of democracy and freedom. Partnerships between organizations promoting girls' schooling and those promoting literacy for adult women, education on legal rights, economic empowerment, environmental protection and democracy are critical to those networks.

Educators now have a **deeper understanding of the barriers to girls' education**. Earlier conventional wisdom assumed that parents did not send daughters to school because parents felt girls were not worth educating. It is now obvious that relatively modest incentives have been sufficient to transform girls' enrolment rates. Tuition waivers in Malawi and organizing community schools with respected women teachers for girls in Balochistan (Pakistan) are examples of this. We now know that if parents believe that schools are appropriate, safe, and of good quality, they usually will send girls to schools willingly.

Finally the agenda has shifted from one of 'making girls better mothers' to **an agenda that encourages the autonomy and empowerment of women and girls**. As Ramirez¹⁵ suggests, the discourse has moved from extolling the virtues of education in making girls better mothers, to asserting girls' and women's rights to education as their due as citizens of nation states to be on a par with fellow male citizens, to demanding education in areas and for purposes that will empower and liberate them; for example, in controlling their fertility. ■

International support for regional, national and local change

Through the preparation and debate that took place before, during and after international conferences and other efforts, a key understanding was reinforced: girls' equal access to quality schooling is their fundamental right and is necessary for national and human development.

International conferences promoting girls' education

A series of international conferences since Jomtien has prompted countries and agencies around the world to implement new policies, programmes, and projects that have resulted in reducing the gender gap. These international meetings have highlighted the importance of educating girls in order to achieve social and development goals and have mobilized governments, NGOs, and other organizations for change in several ways: symbolically, as members of the world community rally around issues of girls' and women's education; through their substance and through networks constructed at the conference; and through their subsequent plans for action that nations consult in developing national and local action plans.

In 1993, representatives from the world's nine most populous countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan) came together at the **E-9 Education Summit**. These countries, which account for more than half of the world's population and 70 per cent of its illiterates, pledged to achieve universal primary education by 2000.

The **International Conference on Population and Development** (1994) in Cairo (ICPD), underscored the importance of human rights, female empowerment, autonomy and education and linked these to the development of society as a whole. Participants from 179 countries re-examined the role of population in development and adopted a programme of action calling for the gender gap in primary and secondary education to be closed by 2005.

Participating states in the **World Summit for Social Development** (1995) in Copenhagen pledged to advance universal, equitable access to quality education to help eradicate poverty, promote employment and foster social integration, with a particular emphasis on girls' education.

Attention to education runs throughout the entire platform of the **Fourth World Conference on Women** (1995) in Beijing

and occupies a prominent position within the separate critical area of concern on the girl-child. Strategic objectives include the following:

- Equal access to education including 80 per cent completion rates and closing the gender gap by 2005 (to be facilitated by including women in making decisions and in mobilizing sufficient resources);
- Reducing female illiteracy to half its 1990 level, focusing on disadvantaged women and expanding the definition of literacy;
- Promoting women's roles in vocational and technical training for income-generating opportunities, particularly in food and agricultural research and extension;
- Advancing non-discriminatory education through gender awareness training for teachers, leadership training, the use of gender studies and research to improve education, and the development of multicultural, multilingual curricula for indigenous women and girls;
- Allocating sufficient resources for educational reforms and monitoring;
- Promoting lifelong learning for girls.

Participants in the **Mid-Decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All** (1996) in Amman candidly reported that progress in girls' and women's education since Jomtien had been very slow. The gender gap in net enrolment rates (NER) had worsened everywhere except in the Arab states. The agenda for the last half of the decade called for legislation for compulsory education; social mobilization to persuade families of the benefits of educating girls; enhanced gender sensitivity in curricula and throughout education systems; safe, girl-friendly schools; awareness of cultural and religious needs; and the need for incentives, (e.g. stipends and day-care facilities to encourage girls' attendance). It also called for the media to communicate positive images of educated girls and women.

The **International Conference on Child Labour** in Oslo (1997) focused on the detrimental impact of children's work on their opportunities for education. Participating governments agreed to create time-bound programmes for universal and compulsory education with a particular emphasis on girls' education.

International agency initiatives

Conferences have contributed to new initiatives for girls' education. Particularly in the second part of the decade, a number of international agencies increased their support for girls' education. While some viewed this as particularly aggressive advocacy, others saw it as a critical strategy to assist countries to achieve EFA. This section highlights a few of the programmes that have promoted various aspects of girls' and women's education.

Within international agencies and governments a number of factors also militate against success in promoting girls' education. An important one is the limited state of knowledge about the complexity of girls' education issues. Since advocacy is frequently the first step in promoting girls' education, agencies must take this complexity into account and ensure that initiatives in this area receive the careful study, design, implementation and monitoring that they require. Merely formulating the objective of improving girls' enrolment, attendance or achievement is not sufficient. Logical links between the activities or strategies and the objective must be clear. When they are not, it is not uncommon that so-called girls' education projects benefit boys more than girls, and result in little discernible impact on girls.

This preparatory phase that focuses on understanding complexity is as crucial to eventual success as is the implementation phase itself. Analysis and planning need to be factored into the design phase and supported with adequate time and resources. To facilitate this, appropriate criteria for tasks and for job performance need to be developed. Similarly, the knowledge gained through research, programming and implementation need to be widely disseminated – both the successes and failures.

Each of the following international agencies (and others) have sponsored studies, evaluations, and reviews that have played a major role in documenting the experience in girls' education. Information about innovative programmes, what works, and lessons learned have often emanated from or been supported by these agencies. In addition, most of them maintain web sites that make such information available via the Internet.

The **Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)**, in partnership with UNICEF, provided \$10 million between 1994 and 1996 to 15 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa to support girls' education.¹⁶ The purpose of the CIDA investment was threefold: 1) to assure girls' access to equitable, quality and relevant primary education so that they would have equal opportunity in participating in their community and society; 2) to develop a long-term plan and strategy for continued CIDA-UNICEF partnership in advancing girls' education; and 3) to contribute to implementation of the UNICEF Global Girls' Education Programme. The development of a multi-country girls' education programme helped to identify common programmatic categories requiring attention in each participating country. It became clear that additional attention was needed for policy development; capacity building of the teaching staff, managers, planners, administrators, and institutions; raising awareness of girls' education and gender issues through advocacy and social mobilization efforts; and improving monitoring systems.

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is a broad based, multi-sectoral agency. It does not identify specific

target groups. However, within its general mandate of poverty eradication, the agency has invested several hundred million dollars in basic education and adult learning.

The **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)** programme to promote girls' education has focused on Africa, principally through two projects. The first, a six-year Special Project on Scientific, Technical and Vocational Education of Girls in Africa, was launched during the biennium 1996/97, with the aim of reducing gender disparities in these areas. Support is provided for such activities as science camps for girls (Ghana and Botswana). An ongoing collaboration with FEMSA has worked to identify science topics of greater interest to girls (e.g. on environmental issues or solar energy). The second project is Guidance and counselling for school-age girls in Africa, a programme that trains trainers to help girls (and boys) deal with issues such as HIV/AIDS infection, drug abuse, and pregnancy. The Guidance, Counselling and Youth Development Centre for Africa (giving special attention to the needs of girls) has been established in Malawi since 1997. An International Centre for the Education of Girls is being established in Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso.

The **United Nations Food and Population Agency (UNFPA)** promotes basic education, particularly the education of girls, within the overall context and goals of the ICPD Programme of Action. It recognizes the need for improvements in basic education as an important prerequisite to sustainable development and as a factor in the development of well-being through its links with demographic as well as economic and social factors. As stated in the ICPD Programme of Action (Chapter XI, Population, Development and Education), reduction of fertility, morbidity and mortality rates *and* the empowerment of women are largely assisted by progress in education. Specifically, the Programme of Action aims 'to (a) achieve universal access to quality education, with particular priority being given to primary and technical education and job training, to combat illiteracy and to eliminate gender disparities in access to, retention in, and support, for education; (b) promote non-formal education for young people, guaranteeing equal access for women and men to literacy centres; and (c) introduce and improve the content of the curriculum so as to promote greater responsibility and awareness on the interrelationships between population and sustainable development, health issues, including reproductive health and gender equity' (United Nations, 1995).

Through the education activities it supports, UNFPA aims to contribute to improvements in the quality of basic education through the introduction of more relevant (population and development related) curricula, promoting curricular reforms and more effective teaching techniques; and to keep the education of girls and women high on national and international agendas. Implementation of this strategy requires comprehensive and sustained advocacy efforts at global, regional and national levels to get the full commitment and support of gov-

ernments, as well as those of relevant international agencies and non-government organizations. At the country level, advocacy has been directed at encouraging community participation in support of education, both in terms of parents' support to girls' access and parent/community support for population education activities.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Global Girls' Education Programme is a multi-country programme that supports girls' education and aims for equitable and quality education for all in more than 60 countries. The global programme is guided by the principles detailed in *Girls' Education: A Framework for Action*, a UNICEF document first produced in 1996 after several years of consultation. UNICEF's rationale was that by targeting girls, UNICEF would be reaching a large proportion of the educationally disadvantaged, and doing so in a way that would benefit the entire educational system.

Using a set of seven broad strategies – support to ongoing country programmes of co-operation, advocacy, partnership, communication, knowledge building, support to NGOs and resource mobilization – UNICEF is supporting education opportunities in countries such as Viet Nam, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Mali, Senegal, Uganda, Guinea and Egypt. The Sara and Meena Initiatives in Africa and Asia, respectively, have produced a series of comic books, videos and posters in support of girls' education. Advocacy for girls' education continues with UNICEF support in places such as Djibouti, Bhutan, Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Building on UNICEF's work with CIDA, a partnership between Norway's **Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs** and UNICEF has increased girls' access to education in most of the 18 countries and targeted zones served by the African Girls Education Initiative (AGEI) being carried out in sub-Saharan Africa. AGEI emphasizes regional capacity building and nation state's attention to girls' education at all levels, from national education plans and policies to classroom instruction and interaction. Noteworthy experiments with alternative and non-formal edu-

cation (NFE) include Guinea's Nafa Centres, Satellite Schools and NFE centres in Burkina Faso, and schools in remote areas of Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana.

The **US Agency for International Development (USAID)** has supported girls' education programmes in 17 countries in Africa, South-East Asia, and South and Central America since 1981, but the majority were initiated after 1989. The projects are ongoing in 14 countries. USAID identified expanding basic education for girls as a special focus and, as a result, has spent \$200 million between 1990 and 1996 in this area. A range of strategies and activities were used in the 17 countries and a recent review of the decade's experience indicated that 'the supply of schools – the quantity, their quality, their suitability for girls, and their costs',¹⁷ was the most common obstacle to girls' education. The elements identified as necessary for successful education for girls included making the promotion of girls' education a social norm, political will to make and sustain investments, and broad engagement by community, NGOs, government, business and international donors.

The **World Bank** has identified girls' education as an institutional priority and has a target of lending \$900 million each year for projects to increase girls' access and achievement. While this target has never been met, the Bank has been attempting to work with client countries to help them identify barriers to girls' schooling and develop appropriate policies. Focusing on 31 countries (World Bank clients with large gender disparities in education related to lending for girls' and women's education), the World Bank tries to promote a multi-pronged response including advocacy, reducing the costs of girls' schooling, school and classroom construction, teacher training, quality enhancement and greater involvement of women in school management and administration. Through partnerships, the World Bank has also worked to identify effective interventions, build capacity in effective resource utilization for EFA, try out innovations, and ensure a means of more effective implementation of girls' education programmes in developing countries.¹⁸ ■

Lessons learned

Efforts of the past decade have taught the world community a significant amount about how – and how not – to expand and improve education for girls. For example, funding expensive pilot projects that a country will never be able to afford to take to scale does not work. Many other efforts are successful. Lessons learned since 1990 about educating girls are here grouped into six areas:¹⁹ political will, leadership, supportive fora, new partnerships, using a systemic approach, and conducting careful research and collecting reliable data to support action.

Political will

Girls' education is more than an educational issue; it is deeply influenced by poverty, tradition, habit, legal systems, and discrimination, among other things. **Political will** is required, not just to educate girls, but also to eliminate these non-education obstacles. The lessons that the past decade has taught about policies, programmes and planning will be crucial to providing equitable education for all in the decade ahead.

Gender-specific policies that **target girls** are necessary. Coherent policies (such as raising the legal marriage age) and programmes are required, but it is not enough to assume that girls' education improves as other aspects of primary education improve. A general expansion of primary schools will initially attract both girls and boys, but a certain proportion of girls will remain out of school unless specific barriers are overcome. Simply expanding primary education without specific regard to the factors affecting girls is insufficient to increase girls' enrolment.²⁰ Policies and programmes that national and community leaders develop to achieve education goals for girls contribute to the crucial process of building consensus around the importance of girls' education at all levels of society.

Political commitment at senior levels from those who make policies and decisions is necessary to move girls' education forward. Policy development and reform need to take place at a central and senior level. It is vital that any policy changes be made within the context of planning and development of the educational system as a whole. Girls' education policies cannot be excluded from the Ministry of Education or left to a newly formed and disconnected unit or project implementation unit. The education of girls needs to be an integral part of the management of the national educational system. Examples of this include the Ugandan government's National Strategy and Plan of Action for Girls' Education in 1998, and Burkina Faso's National Plan for Girls' Education (1994–2000). This plan aims to ensure access to schooling for all children, improve educational quality, increase community participation in education, and improve capacity building at the national level.

■ The Botswana re-entry policy

What are the effects of the Ministry of Education's re-entry policy that allow girls who were pregnant to re-enter the school system? The Forum of African Women Educationists (FAWE) sponsored this study to analyse and investigate the adequacy, impact, and implementation of a policy that dates back to the 1970s.

Employing a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, including survey questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis, the study interviewed secondary school students, secondary school teachers and head teachers, primary school heads, community members, officials from the Central Statistics Office, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and UNICEF, and members of village development committees. Access to national statistics allowed for calculation of drop-out and re-entry rates.

The study found that three out of every 100 girls dropped out due to pregnancy. Constraints hindered effective implementation of the policy and resulted in gender discrimination in its application at school level. Hindrances included:

- poor collaboration among the three ministries responsible for implementing the policy;
- lack of clarity in some clauses of the policy;
- lack of awareness of, understanding of and support for the policy among school heads, students, and community members;
- stringent re-admission procedures for girls; and
- negative attitudes of both students and teachers towards the returning female students.

As a result of these factors, re-admission rates for girls were lower than those for boys. Due to the confidentiality clause in the policy, no data could be collected on the persistence and performance of those who were re-admitted, making it difficult to monitor or evaluate the effectiveness of the policy.

The government of Botswana has since decided to revise the policy, to review implementation guidelines and, through the Central Statistics Office, to revamp the way in which data on drop-out is collected from Botswana's schools.

Source: Chilisa, 1997, An Analysis and Evaluation of the Botswana Re-entry Policy, FAWE.

As countries in every region develop future plans to ensure education for all within the next 10 to 15 years, this set of questions may guide discussions for future planning:

- Is the policy environment appropriate, or are changes needed?
- Have the right populations been targeted?
- What barriers to implementation still exist?
- Have problems been properly identified?
- Are the proposed solutions being monitored and evaluated?

Leadership

Active, pragmatic leaders who are able and willing to negotiate and compromise in the best interests of girls' education both facilitate and lead the way to improvements in girls' education. Women's strong leadership is particularly important. Leadership takes many forms; some leaders are strong advocates, other quiet reformers. But these differences notwithstanding, the examples of leaders in government, religion, civil society,

NGOs, education, and the law, for example, provide extraordinary legitimacy for girls' education.

The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) is one example of an organizational network that captures the synergy of ideas, the influence, and the power of women leaders working to promote the best interests of girls' education. Five African women Ministers of Education founded the Federation of African Women Educationalists (FAWE) in 1992. The organization now has thirty full members (Ministers or Vice Chancellors), thirty associate members (former Ministers or Vice Chancellors) and twenty-eight male associate members (Ministers of Education). To facilitate national and grass-roots work, national chapters, at various stages of development, are present in more than thirty countries. FAWE has pressed forward on an agenda of policy change and advocacy; it also has a programme that gives awards for innovation.

In addition to leadership at international, national and district levels, the leadership of pupils, parents, teachers, community members, school management and administration is also essential to the improvement of girls' education. Since girls' education is closely related to established patterns of discrimination against women and girls, leaders at all levels need to work to mobilize the entire range of stakeholders around the key educational issues for girls. These stakeholders will together help form a new set of standards and values affirming that girls' have the right to basic education, and that the community has an obligation to provide it in a supportive and enabling environment. Utilizing stakeholders, especially the community, to analyse the situation and intervene in girls' education, has proved very fruitful in expanding educational opportunities for girls over and over again.

Supportive fora

Conferences, workshops, newsletters and networks that promote girls' education provide the supportive fora necessary to keep the issues alive and visible to the public eye. These media also facilitate the sharing of new research and experiences, whether successes or failures. One example of this is Zimbabwe's *The New Generation* newsletter that targets schools and equal opportunities for males and females and reaches more than one-third of all primary and secondary schools. Zimbabwe also held gender sensitization workshops throughout the country for 1,200 school heads and 840 members of school development committees and associations.

In addition to the international conferences described above, regional, national, and local conferences and workshops also push forward the agenda for girls' education. In August 1999, UNICEF's Southern Asia Regional Office facilitated a strategy meeting on gender and violence against women and girls. Over fifty participants from the region attended. The event took them in clear directions for redesigning their work. One result from a follow-up meeting was the Indian government's com-

mitment to continue support for girl's education and activities to reduce maternal mortality.

Ongoing awareness-raising about girls' education is central to sustaining its impact. Gender sensitization cannot be viewed as a one-time workshop event. Deepening individual, collective, and institutional awareness of girls' issues requires long-term, thoughtful analysis and reflection. Policies and programmes need to emphasize continuing awareness education about educating girls at all levels. This is especially important for key actors in gender and education issues to ensure that they understand and can communicate the rationale of girls' education. Programme activities need to ensure a gender perspective that points out the need to integrate gender analysis into the beginning stages of programme development. This will help to increase knowledge and to change attitudes, practices, and behaviour towards girls' education at all levels.

New partnerships

The only way to properly combine all five of these key areas (political will, leadership, supportive fora, systemic approach, research and reliable data), in a way that facilitates the kinds of change necessary to give all girls a basic education of good quality, has been through **extended and expanded partnerships**. New and creative partnerships have brought the necessary dynamism into education systems, defined broadly, and enabled them to expand and reach out to include girls. In the 1990s partnerships developed between unlikely entities: corporations, non-governmental organizations, communities, teacher organizations, governments, students, and international organizations. Partners have sometimes had to adapt to new modes of functioning together, but this has stimulated innovation.

■ Partnership

Three examples of ongoing partnerships in support of girls' education help illustrate the kind of innovation that has emerged in this area.

- The Partnership for Strategic Resource Planning is a joint programme of FAWE, the Association for Development of Education in Africa, the Economic Development Institute of the World Bank, the Governments of Ireland and Norway, the Rockefeller Foundation and USAID. In collaboration with nine African governments, its objective is to build capacity to plan and utilize resources efficiently to help meet EFA goals, particular in narrowing the gender gap.
- The UNICEF/World Bank Programme under the Bank's Development Grant Facility provides a grant that allows UNICEF to pilot small-scale innovative education initiatives, particularly in African and Southern Asian countries.
- The Multi-Agency Partnership on Sustainable Strategies for Girls' Education is a partnership including the World Bank, the British Department for International Development, the Rockefeller Foundation and UNICEF in an exploration of how to achieve more effective implementation of girls' education programmes in developing countries.

Source: World Bank, *The World Bank and Girls' Education*.

Developing partnerships across sectors is helping to remove obstacles to girls' education. Water, hygiene and sanitation; income-generating activities; health and nutrition services; integrating life-skills education into school curricula (including HIV/AIDS prevention education) – these are some of the areas being linked to girls' education programmes. For example, in Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, and Benin, education is linked with income-generating projects. South Africa and Burkina Faso have created links with early-childhood care and development programmes. Cape Verde and Ethiopia have integrated water and sanitation project activities, both important considerations for attracting pupils to and keeping them in school.

The African Girls' Education Initiative (AGEI) is an innovative partnership between UNICEF and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with CIDA that evolved during the last half of the decade. A comprehensive, integrated structure that links national, regional, and global systems supports the AGEI. Programme implementation combines seven strategies, which operate concurrently at the various levels: ongoing support for country programmes of co-operation; advocacy; partnership; communication; knowledge building; support to NGOs; and resource mobilization.

The multi-country programme was designed to implement a distinct and coherent vision for achieving change in girls' education in over twenty African countries. A programme approach, rather than a project approach, means that funds are channelled to country-specific girls' education programmes at the national level. Partners associated with national institutions, ministries, NGOs, communities, and individuals formulate and implement the activities that reflect contextual needs and interests. The programme has enabled 6,300 girls in Chad to enrol in school for the first time, increasing the enrolment rate from 65 per cent in 1997 to 70 per cent in 1998 in the 8 *sous-prefectures* involved. In Swaziland, teachers have been trained in continuous assessment to improve the quality of education programmes. At regional levels, an especially successful dimension of the work has been the development of regional technical assessment teams that build regional and national capacity in monitoring and evaluation (M&E). And, at the global level, UNICEF's Education Section plays a key role in developing programme policy and co-ordinating programme advocacy, communication strategies, and other areas.

Systemic approach

A long-term, coherent approach, incorporating all aspects of the education system as well as what will come in the years after, is the best option for making a difference. It is clear that to address issues of quality, equivalence, and demand in ways that can be sustained, it is essential to take a **systemic approach** to reforms so that girls are no longer excluded. Guinea, collaborating with donor partners, took this approach to education reform in the 1990s.

■ Guinea-Conakry: Building on success

Early in the 1990s, following years of educational decline, Guinea identified girls' education as a national priority. Over the past 8 years, Guinea has achieved an annual increase for primary school enrolment of around 16 per cent for girls and 10 per cent for boys. For the first time ever, the gap in Grade 1 admissions has almost completely disappeared in one region of the country.

The country began by carefully assessing the challenges in girls' education with donor partners and then formulating remedial policies. Several major studies of girls' schooling issues were conducted that included careful analysis of the gender implications of new education investments. Key policy changes supported the initiative. Girls who had become pregnant were no longer barred by regulations from returning to school. All new schools were required to have latrines, since the lack of latrines contributes significantly to girls' absence and dropout from school. Guinea shored up these changes with a national information campaign that stressed the value and importance of girls' education.

Guinea has worked hard to improve the quality and relevance of schooling. In the past, girls, in contrast to boys, had very limited access to textbooks. Now free textbooks are distributed on a regular basis to all students. Efforts have also been made to upgrade the quality of the faculty and increase the number of women teachers. This has been a particular challenge; as qualification requirements for new teacher candidates were increased, the pool of eligible female candidates dropped sharply from 25 per cent to 15 per cent of applicants. Despite this, the government has managed to steadily increase the number of women teachers.

Guinea has also broken new ground in pushing efforts to improve students' basic health and readiness to learn. School children have been treated for helminth infections and provided with iron and iodine supplements. These health measures especially benefit female students.

Source: World Bank, The World Bank and Girls' Education.

Overall, it is clear that to overcome gender bias and discrimination it is essential to change education systems rather than to work on the margins. This has been an extremely positive lesson learned in girls' education, and has shown that quality and access are inextricably linked. Thus, many actions in support of girls' education have addressed quality, resulting in demonstrable improvements for boys as well as for girls. It is paradoxical that, in some cases, quality improvements for girls' education have actually increased the gender gap!

The review of a decade of USAID work in girls' education²¹ around the world concluded that in order to make a difference, strategies are needed that will differentially or specifically promote the schooling of girls. These strategies do not stand alone. They interconnect and mutually reinforce each other, they change both characteristics and dynamics of the system and thus contribute to systemic change. It helps to:

- locate schools near girls;
- staff schools with female teachers;
- enforce girl-friendly regulations;
- strengthen community ownership and participation; and
- reduce schooling costs.

Locating schools near girls addresses concerns about girls' safety and their availability for domestic chores. This also brings the community closer to schools and makes it possible for them to support the schools – as well as their daughters – in various ways.

Staffing schools with female teachers also addresses safety issues and can provide girls with role models of a career they can pursue through their own education. This often means staffing a school with at least one female teacher. Marshalling the political will at all levels to leverage resources that will support these strategies will move the agenda of girls' education forward dramatically.

Increasing the proportion of female teachers in primary schools has a positive impact on female enrolments, as Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and other countries have seen. In order to augment their numbers, however, recruitment policies for teachers may need to be revised. Some options include reserving a proportion of places in teacher-training colleges for girls, decentralizing recruitment of local females, and revising administrative policies that affect female teachers. Systematic assessment of the impact of these policies would be useful information for designing future initiatives. In countries like Afghanistan, where extreme fundamentalist religious policies have pushed girls out of school, creative alternatives are needed. In Afghanistan, UNICEF informally supports unemployed female teachers who have set up schools in their homes and where up to 60 per cent of the students are female.

While the teaching force in some countries – especially in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa – are dominated by male teachers, countries in Central Europe, Latin America, and other areas report a predominantly female teaching force. The latter case may represent inequity and lower pay for women teachers, especially at the primary level, and must be addressed. In either scenario the concern is expressed that children should see and have teachers of their same sex as role models. However, to date there is no evidence of parents forbidding sons to enrol in co-educational schools with all women teachers, whereas parents do keep their daughters out of school if no female teachers are present. Perceptions and reassurances of safety are critical for girls, and the presence of women teachers in a male-dominated teaching force – women teachers who value girls and boys equally – must become a high priority.

Enforcing girl-friendly regulations ensures that schools are safe, respectful places for girls. Policies made at the national level, regulations for an entire school, and teacher-made rules for a classroom can all contribute to a school that is friendly to girls. Regulations might include returning girls to their rightful place in school following a pregnancy, constructing adequate latrine facilities for males and females, appointing girls to school leadership positions, or dismissing male teachers or students who sexually harass female students. These regulations

and their enforcement are necessary to make a difference in the lives and academic experiences of girls. The safety and security of girls was a major theme in the African Conference on the Empowerment of Women through Functional Literacy and Education, and needs to continue as a major theme in education plans for the next decade.

Strengthening community ownership and participation. Community and family empowerment and participation in school management and other activities are key to ensuring that girls enrol in, attend, and stay in school. Family and community participation contribute to the processes of decentralization and the institutionalization of community involvement in education. This, in turn, increases programme/project quality and sustainability. For example, in the family, a mother's support of her daughter's education is a key factor in girls' attending and staying in school. In disadvantaged communities, members have contributed significantly to girls' education by providing school funds, management, and the land, time and labour necessary for constructing schools and classrooms.

Community ownership of schools, (management, control, financing and organization) is an important building block in promoting the educational participation of girls, particularly among populations that have traditionally had low female participation rates. Raising community awareness and responsibility for addressing some of the barriers to education has had impressive results in places like Bangladesh, Pakistan and Mali. Discussions of community involvement is not a panacea, however; communities must be empowered in deed. Adequate human, financial and administrative resources are needed to enable communities to fulfil their roles, as is a clear division of responsibility between communities and local and central governments.

Once communities are empowered to create and manage schools near their homes, with teachers they can trust and a curriculum they believe in, resistance to sending girls to school and keeping them there past puberty appears to melt away.

Cost reduction. In 1991/2 Malawi, with the support of USAID, introduced tuition waivers for non-repeating girls in primary school. Although the sums involved were small, about US\$5 a year per child in rural areas and US\$9 in urban areas, the waivers made a big difference. The money lost through fees was made available to the central Ministry of Education as a lump sum grant from USAID.

Malawi had historically experienced a persistent gender gap to the advantage of boys. The year the waivers were introduced, girls were a majority in Standard 1 (51 percent)²² and girls' net enrolment in primary was 60 per cent compared to boys at 57 percent. Two years later, the government introduced free primary education for all and abolished the requirement that school children wear uniforms. The response from boys restored the gender gap, but levels of enrolment for both gen-

ders has risen tremendously and Malawi is now close to universal primary enrolment.

Benin introduced a bill that exempted girls in rural areas from paying school fees in 1993. While this is reported to have improved girls' enrolment rates in rural areas, there was also some negative impact since no revenue was available from other sources to replace the lost funds. An unequivocal benefit of any cost reduction initiative, however, is that lowered schooling costs can eliminate the necessity of parents having to choose which child, if any, will go to school.

The five topics discussed above provide an important framework for the fundamental aspect of systemic change: what goes on in the classroom. Finally, it is important to provide a **child-friendly learning environment**. The quality of education can be improved for all children and sustained over time through the creation of a child-friendly learning environment for girls and boys. This includes using participatory teaching and learning strategies and making use of locally available resources/materials. Programmes in Southern Asia are placing priority on the quality of education with programmes implementing concepts such as multiple ways of teaching learning (MWTL), joyful learning, and child-friendly schools. Over 16,000 schools in Bangladesh are implementing the Bangladeshi Directorate of Primary Education's Intensive District Approach to Education for All (IDEAL). In 1999 IDEAL worked to build local level management and planning, launch a communication campaign, monitor school quality, conduct studies and adjust the curriculum to be gender sensitive. The formative evaluation has revealed that local level planning has mobilized local funds to provide an average of US \$500 per school. In addition, teachers trained in MWTL have shown that using a number of teaching methods (group work, role-playing, singing) is positive and effective.

Once in school, girls and boys need to learn something meaningful. Issues of **learning and achievement** are complex, but they need to be addressed. They include curriculum content and the capacity of the school system to implement it; the teaching processes and methods used to convey content; strategies for assessing learning gains and achievement, whether through continuous assessment or final examinations; and concomitant implications for training and recruitment into the teaching service.

These issues are being addressed within a wider socio-political context that often contributes to the emergence of workable solutions. With a global push towards democracy and the encouragement towards greater decentralization of political

power with the implicit emergence of greater local autonomy and accountability, getting more girls into school no longer seems an intractable problem. As the officers at the community level with the greatest knowledge of the barriers are now increasingly being granted the authority to address them, remarkable innovative solutions evolve almost routinely. In sub-Saharan Africa, a number of government-sponsored alternative education programmes (COPE in Uganda, PAGE in Zambia and Dina schools in Madagascar) are providing basic education outside the formal system in a manner that recognizes and accommodates local realities. The Bangladesh Rural Action Committee (BRAC) remains one of the most remarkable efforts in successfully providing schooling opportunities for girls outside the formal school system.

Research and reliable data

Good information can support action in a number of ways. First, it can help planners and programme designers develop effective programmes and target those populations that need help. Second, public information considerably advances advocacy and promotes community ownership. Third, it can help monitor and assess progress.

Information needs to be collected carefully and recorded accurately and consistently, using sound instruments that allow data to be disaggregated by gender. The data must be analysed systematically and interpreted appropriately. Consumers of the data then must be taught how to use the information prudently.

As school systems reach gender parity in access and other measures of girls' participation in school, attention will shift to the qualitative aspects of their participation. It is relatively easy to measure how many girls are in school, and how many are passing examinations. Measuring other aspects of schooling, however, such as the ways in which (and the degree to which) teachers' attitudes, images in textbooks, or interactions with other pupils affirm or erode girls' self esteem and educational aspirations, has been very difficult up to now.

Qualitative measurement requires a different kind of process of data gathering and analysis that may not be familiar to those accustomed to dealing with quantitative data and indicators. Yet it is equally important – and will increase in importance – in this first decade of the new century. Interventions that focus on changing teacher attitudes or teaching methods require indicators to capture these processes and assess their progress. ■

Trends

Changes effected through new policies, programmes, and directions in turn create fresh challenges and result in new priorities. These are discussed in the next section.

New challenges

Certainly the focus on girls' education from a gender perspective has raised many important issues about boys' education, and it is fully recognized that a **gender-sensitive education** is one of the things that will make the vision of Education for All a reality. Similarly, the evolution over the decade in girls' education and, in particular, attempts to better understand the gender gap, have resulted in a much better understanding of **exclusion** – from school, but also in the classroom, even for many who are already in school but who are excluded from effective learning. This work, often pioneered by a focus on girls, can make it possible to adapt what is known to include other excluded and marginalized groups – one of which consists of **adolescents**, and there are others.

The **HIV/AIDS** pandemic is presenting unexpected challenges of enormous proportions. Girls are disproportionately negatively affected, whether they are infected or not. Immediate and concerted effort is essential, or more than 10 years' of hard-won gains in girls' education will be eliminated in just a few years.

It is very apparent from the work in girls' education that the access to and quality of education are inextricably linked – it would be easier if this were not the case. This relates very closely to two other critical aspects of girls' (and boys') education: the need to understand both supply and demand and how these play out, one against the other. Everybody agrees that quality is important, but the experience of and challenge arising from girls' education is that the very **notion of quality must change** in some very fundamental ways. A quality education includes learning the basics and learning how to learn in a safe, secure, gender-sensitive, healthy, and protective learning environment. This finding is an enormous challenge for those educational systems in which it is difficult to offer basic education that meets a conventional definition of quality.

New research is revealing that the processes that accompany **globalization** are capable of increasing disparity and on a tremendous scale. This is particularly alarming, because women already compose the majority of the poor, and globalization could exacerbate this situation. In the face of this challenge and to break the cycle of women's poverty, girls' education has to be given new priority. On the other hand, the promise of the potential inherent in the new **information and communication technologies** could make an enormous dif-

ference in alleviating unfair disparities. A paradoxical challenge for girls' education is deeply embedded in this possibility, however. There is growing evidence that girls and women are less likely to benefit from these new technologies than boys and men.

A challenge not frequently discussed but which is becoming more obvious is a worldwide movement in support of religious **fundamentalism**, frequently with a concomitant decrease in the rights and empowerment of girls and women. The links of fundamentalism to patriarchy and their implications for educational change deserve more attention if girls' education is to move ahead at an accelerated pace.

To fully grasp these challenges and monitor how they are going to affect girls' education will require more robust data that extend beyond the conventional education statistics. **Disaggregated data** will also be necessary, so that the nature of challenges can be properly understood.

Priorities

It is not possible to address every issue simultaneously. Priorities have to be set: some can be established globally, but good analysis at local and national levels will be essential in determining how best to overcome the barriers to girls' education in a particular context, and in what order. Simple **access** to any kind of basic education remains a major issue for millions of children, the majority of them girls.

Careful and strategic application of the lessons learned to **close the gender gap** and **address educational quality** are essential if *all* are to receive a quality basic education. There is no single intervention that will work everywhere – each context is different, and efforts must be made to adapt what is known to the particular and nuanced circumstances working against girls' education. Moreover, efforts in support of girls' education must now move from what have been limited efforts to **efforts on a massive scale**. This presents enormous challenges worldwide, but without such an acceleration, the majority of excluded girls will remain excluded from education – and from much more for the foreseeable future.

To make this extra effort, to accelerate progress, will require **ingenuity, persistence**, ongoing fostering of **new partnerships**, and significant **resource mobilization and utilization**. There are probably fewer 'lessons learned' in girls' education with regard to resource mobilization than in any of the other areas selected for discussion. Yet, this topic may present one of the greatest remaining challenges. It is hard to reach the girls who must be included (poor, with disabilities, affected by conflict or HIV/AIDS, engaged in child labour, for example), and it is likely to take more resources per child to reach them than it took to reach those who were already in school.

To reach the goal of Education for All, girls must be included – without this the world will have failed to deliver on the promise of a basic education for all. Girls can be included. It is possible. We can, we must, achieve this goal.

Knowledge/Information Dissemination. Disseminating the knowledge of (a) what the range of possible strategies to be used with respect to improving girls' education are; (b) what local conditions and opportunities call for; and (c) what the optimal mix of strategies can be, is a continuing challenge. Further, expanding the educational opportunities for girls and women tends to lead to the emergence of issues about the availability of career opportunities. If girls are gaining as much education as boys, then the rationale for excluding them from certain careers becomes less and less justifiable. An underlying challenge in this area is to understand what the key elements of a successful strategy are and which aspects are context-specific. For example, there have been many attempts to replicate the success of the BRAC schools, but none have come close to replicating either their organizational efficiency or their appeal to girls.

Developing a consensus on what quality in education means.

The increased enrolments that often result when parents are encouraged to send their daughters to school almost always bring into sharp focus a debate on quality. The sudden increase in enrolments can cause acute shortages of classrooms, textbooks, teachers and pedagogical materials. There can be a deterioration of quality on a number of dimensions: performance, repetition and dropout rates, teacher morale and turnover, and parental satisfaction. The challenge then becomes the task of identifying the critical indicator or set of indicators for measuring shifts in quality and assessing which of the many input variables contributes most to maintaining quality. Once this has been established, a national consensus needs to be developed and shared so that limited resources will be effectively spent.

This question requires a close collaboration between technical experts, who can assess the impact of different sets of quality indicators, and community and government interests who can use that information to come to political and economic decisions about the organization of schools.

Monitoring and Feedback. The effective implementation of any new initiative requires close monitoring and processes for continuous review, assessment, evaluation and re-formulation. When carried out in an environment in which stakeholders are empowered to share their views, these processes will lead to a more effective implementation, in which bottlenecks and

unexpected consequences are dealt with more quickly and lessons are shared more systematically.

Changing Environment. The rapid change in technology, particularly information technology, and the forces of globalization have made the issue of exclusion from basic education even more urgent. Countries without significant numbers of computer-literate men and women are in danger of finding themselves permanently thrust into the periphery. Females are particularly vulnerable because all the available evidence suggests that women, even in the West, are only a small minority of Internet users, computer programmers, web designers, etc.

As the gender gap closes, it is becoming obvious that marginal girls need to be reached. This girl is likely to be poor, to live in remote areas – either geographical or culturally – to be of a different religion or ethnicity. Providing an education²³ of sufficient quality and relevance will be more and more challenging and expensive. However, we should be encouraged by the success that has already been experienced in educating populations hitherto considered unreachable.

We need to be particularly vigilant about viewing 'the girl child' as a unitary concept. As has been noted before, while gender is a very important human parameter, it is not the only one. The relative disadvantage of each individual girl is mediated by her family's income, her ethnicity, religion and nationality, to name but a few factors. Are the new programmes and policies being utilized by those who need them, or are they simply magnifying the advantage of those who already enjoy high status? In particular, what does it mean when female enrolment increases more sharply at the secondary and tertiary levels than it does at primary, even in countries with relatively low enrolment levels?

As we work towards attaining universal primary education, it will be important that each region and country develop reasonable targets and benchmarks for girls' education.

It would be a mistake to ignore the changes that have taken place in the global environment when we discuss the achievement of universal access to schooling. It is patently clear that our notion of basic education will need to encompass levels of technical competence that were undreamed of in 1990. In a modern economy, more and more of even the most basic jobs (factories, supermarkets, etc.) require a familiarity with computers. How many of the girls in school (both in the developing and the developed world) will be able to attain computer literacy during their school career over the next decade? ■

Conclusion

The participants at Jomtien identified girls' education as an important issue and this was underscored at the Amman Mid-Decade Review of EFA. At Dakar, in 2000, it remained, unfortunately, a pressing priority. The urgency of addressing the issue cannot be underestimated. This is where the biggest part of the problem lies with regard to denying children their right to basic education.

The picture is not all bleak, however. Over the decade, there have been significant changes. The Middle East is one region that has demonstrated that the education of girls is quite doable, even in situations where it initially appeared that there might be serious traditional barriers. It can be done.

Also, over the decade much has been accomplished in terms of understanding what it takes to make a difference with regard to girls' education. Whereas access issues were predominant ten years ago, now it is known that:

- Access and quality are inseparable. Supply of and demand for education are intricately linked. This is especially the case when the education of girls is considered by families and communities.
- Gender discrimination is deeply rooted throughout education systems, and to ensure that all girls participate and learn, it is essential that systemic gender bias be eliminated. There are cases where school places are available, but girls do not attend because of gender bias. This points to the need for a new understanding of what quality education really is – learning environments that are rights-based, child-friendly, effective with children, gender-sensitive, and healthy for and protective of children.
- Girls' education is not just a matter of concern for educators – it is everybody's business. It is everybody's business because it is society that creates the conditions that mitigate against girls' education and it is that very same society that is paying the high price for not educating its girl-children. This shared responsibility calls for actions outside of education in support of girls' education, as well as actions within education systems.
- The concept of expanded partnerships promoted at Jomtien has proven to be sound in regard to advocating for and implementing girls' education. Effective strategies have mobilized and engaged a wide range of partners. Parents and community members, as well as girls themselves, have proven to be critical partners in most situations.
- Careful analysis prior to implementing interventions is absolutely essential. It is known that girls' education is com-

plex because of the multiplicity of factors that come into play when decisions are made about whether to educate a girl or not, and when a girl decides whether to stay in a learning environment or leave it. Interventions that have not taken into account the complexity of the situation are likely to run into problems.

- Resources are critical. Reaching the excluded, the majority of whom are female, is proving to have higher unit costs than the costs of those who are already included. The attention to quality also adds to the resource needs, but it has been shown that quality improvements made under the auspices of girls' education benefit boys, sometimes even more than they do girls, so they are investments in systemic improvements.
- Good analysis demands disaggregated data and this is often hard to find. Nevertheless, one of the contributions that a focus on girls' education is making is to underscore the call for better and disaggregated data so that education actions can be appropriately targeted to make good use of existing resources.

Thus, the emphasis from Jomtien on girls' access to basic education has shifted considerably. While some would argue that this change may be adding unnecessary complexity, results on the ground indicate that when this complexity is given due consideration, in fact, significant change is possible, and in a relatively short period of time. Furthermore, lessons from expanding girls' education are being applied to other disadvantaged groups.

A focus on girls using a gender perspective has led to much better understanding of how to meet some of the new challenges of the millennium, such as globalization and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Understanding that these processes have a differential impact on sub-populations has facilitated the development of more effective and targeted actions.

There have been some difficult lessons to learn, but these have become part of the knowledge base now, and it should not be necessary to repeat them. At the same time, the knowledge base relating to girls' education is so much deeper and broader than it was in 1990, and the experience on the ground is much vaster. Community by community, and country by country, it is becoming clear that girls' education is not just a possibility, it is a reality. In many cases, the desire to overcome what seemed an intractable problem has provided opportunities to experiment and to offer options for change to existing systems of education that were very inflexible. Thus, girls' education has contributed in a modest way to the need to reform education systems so that they better meet the needs of the 21st century.

There are many models and approaches, there are many actors and supporters, but, in the final analysis, the evidence is in. Girls' education can be achieved. Without it, Education For All will never happen.

Notes

1. This thematic study is part of a series that has been commissioned by one of the convening partners to address issues that were considered in need of further study and emphasis by the Steering Committee of the EFA Forum.
2. *Education for All: Achieving the Goal. Final Report*, Mid-decade Meeting of International Consultative Forum on Education for All, Amman, Jordan, 1996.
3. Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28, 1, New York, United Nations, 1989 (A/RES/44/25).
4. P. Schultz, Chapter 2, in Elizabeth M. King and M. Anne Hill (eds.), *Women's Education in Developing Countries: Barriers, Benefits and Policies* (A World Bank Research Publication), Baltimore (United States), Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, 352 pp.
5. G. Ranis and F. Stewart, 'Strategies for Success in Human Development', draft [report] prepared for the First Global Forum on Human Development, New York, July 1999 (Human Development Report Office, United Nations Development Programme).
6. King and Hill, op. cit..
7. Country reports are available at www2.unesco.org/efa/wef/countryreports/home.html
8. The review is based on data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, based on projections after 1998.
9. Elizabeth Rosenthal, 'School a Rare Luxury for Rural Chinese Girls', *The New York Times*, 1 November 1999.
10. Ibid.
11. UNICEF, 1997 data.
12. 'The Situation of Girls Education in the Arab States', Paper presented at the Mid-East EFA Regional meeting.
13. It is easier for women to be infected with the HIV/AIDS virus transmitted by men, than vice versa. Young, adolescent girls undergoing physical development are even more susceptible. In addition, a dangerous myth has gained wide currency that sexual relations with young, sexually inexperienced girls is one way to cure the disease.
14. UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children*, 1999, 1999.
15. Francisco O. Ramirez, 'Progress, Justice and Gender Equity: World Models and Cross National Trends', Berkeley (United States), Stanford University Press, 1997.
16. UNICEF, Final Consolidated Report to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to Government of Canada on CIDA Phase I Support to the UNICEF Girls' Education Programme in Africa, 1999.
17. USAID, Centre for Development Information and Evaluation, *More, But Not Yet Better: USAID's Programs and Policies to Improve Girls' Education*, USAID Evaluation Highlights No. 64, 1999.
18. The Partnership for Strategic Resource Planning; the UNICEF/World Bank Program; and the Multi-Agency Partnership on Sustainable Strategies for Girls' Education.
19. Mary J. Pigozzi, 'Educating the Girl Child: Best Foot Forward?' *UN Chronicle*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 2, pp 39–41.
20. USAID, op.cit.
21. Ibid.
22. Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, *Basic Education Statistics: Malawi 1993*, Tables 3 and 4.
23. See, for example, J. Capper, *Testing to Learn; Learning to Test: Improving Educational Testing in Developing Countries*, Washington, D. C., The International Reading Association and the Academy for Educational Development, 1996; R. J. Stiggins, New York, Macmillan, 1994; P. W. Hill and C. Crevola, 'The role of standards in educational reform for the 21st century', in D. D. Marsh (ed.), *Preparing Our Schools for the 21st Century*, ASCD Yearbook, Alexandria, Virginia (United States), Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1999.

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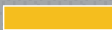













Education for All 2000 Assessment



Since 1990 there has been some progress with regard to gender equality in education, but much remains to be done. A number of activities that have made this progress possible are now known. Political will, dynamic and creative leadership, a systemic approach, and partnerships within and outside of the education sector are all essential for this progress. New challenges have emerged, however, which mean that efforts in support of girls' education need to be redoubled. These challenges include: the complex nature of exclusionary processes, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the growing number of adolescents in need of basic education, recognition that quality inputs have different impacts on girls and boys, globalization, and the potential of information and communication technologies. The paper closes with a strong call to set priorities, even within girls' education, indicating that this area still requires solid gender analysis.

Girls' Education is one of the thematic studies published by UNESCO for the International Consultative Forum on Education for All as part of the Education for All 2000 Assessment. This worldwide evaluation was undertaken towards the end of the decade following the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990) as preparation for the World Education Forum on education for all held in Dakar (Senegal) in April 2000.

The complete list of titles in the series is given below.

-  Achieving Education for All: Demographic Challenges
-  Applying New Technologies and Cost-Effective Delivery Systems in Basic Education
-  Community Partnerships in Education: Dimensions, Variations and Implications
-  Early Childhood Care and Development
-  Education for All and Children Who are Excluded
-  Education in Crisis: The Impact and Lessons of the East Asian Financial Shock 1997-99
-  Education in Situations of Emergency and Crisis: Challenges for the New Century
-  Funding Agency Contributions to Education for All
-  Girls' Education
-  Inclusion in Education: The Participation of Disabled Learners
-  Literacy and Adult Education
-  Reason for Hope: The Support of NGOs to Education for All
-  School Health and Nutrition
-  Textbooks and Learning Materials 1990-99

Each thematic study aims to provide theoretical vision and practical guidance to education planners and decision-makers at national and international levels. In order to provide a global review, they draw upon and synthesize submissions from partner institutions and agencies in each of the EFA regions. They attempt to describe 'best practices' as well as successful and unsuccessful experiments in policy implementation.