



## Global Partners in Action: NGO Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Development

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### Education: Key to Success

The links among education and economic growth, income distribution and poverty reduction are well established. Education lowers infant and maternal mortality and helps improve nutrition and health.<sup>1</sup> It equips people with the knowledge and skills they need to increase income and expand opportunities for employment. The benefits show in personal lives, household well-being and national economies.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past 15 years, most countries have sought ways to increase girls' education rates as integral to effective population and development programmes. Governments in general now understand that girls who are denied education will rely on childbearing as a major source of security and status as women. They will marry early, raise less healthy families, and contribute less to economic growth.

To raise the status of women, governments have made primary education more accessible to all children. Nearly as many girls as boys now enter primary school, an impressive achievement. However, the world is not yet on course for achieving universal primary education: far fewer girls than boys complete that primary school or continue to secondary or university schooling.

#### The Situation

- > Of the world's 776 million illiterate adults, two-thirds are women.<sup>3</sup>
- > Faced with a lack of girl-friendly facilities (such as private sanitary facilities and protection from sexual harassment), many parents withdraw their daughters from school when they reach adolescence.
- > Fully 75 million children of primary school age are not in school, including a third of the relevant age group in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>4</sup>
- > At least 29 million children will still be out of school in 2015. This is probably understated: it does not include countries in conflict such as Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Millions more will start classes but drop out before completing primary school, and additional millions will graduate from inadequate schools without achieving the most basic literacy and numeracy skills.<sup>5</sup>
- > More than a third of children in rich countries complete university, but in much of sub-Saharan Africa, just 5 percent attend college at all.<sup>6</sup>
- > Substantial evidence shows that educated girls, especially those who have completed secondary education, are less likely to marry young, to have an unwanted pregnancy and to engage in high-risk behaviour such as drug abuse and unsafe sex.<sup>7</sup>
- > Every year of education for a mother improves her children's nutritional status. This is critical: long-term malnutrition can result in stunting, which lowers IQ, reduces school attendance and is associated with lower adult productivity and income. In one study, stunting afflicted nearly one half of children in Nigeria whose mothers had no education, and in India it was nearly 60 percent.<sup>8</sup>
- > Education programs to train an additional 364,000 midwives, backed by emergency obstetric care, could reduce maternal mortality rates by about 75 percent in the developing world.<sup>9</sup>

#### The ICPD Commitment

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994 agreed that education is key to sustainable development. It is a component of well-being that gives individuals the knowledge and skills to be more productive. It helps reduce fertility and maternal death and disability; it empowers women, improves the quality of the workforce and promotes democracy. Every year of education delays a girl's marriage, lowers the number of children she has and raises those children's survival rate.

The Cairo Consensus sought to achieve universal access to quality education, combat illiteracy, promote non-formal education for young people and improve curricula to instill greater responsibility on health issues, sustainable development and gender equity. It called for education on population issues to begin in

primary school and continue through the lifespan, including non-formal and public education campaigns using mass media and entertainment.<sup>10</sup>

### Areas for Action

- > Countries should improve access to good-quality learning opportunities so as to strengthen economic growth – raising productivity, supporting innovation and fostering the adoption of new technology.<sup>11</sup>
- > Schools must provide quality education for girls. Quality education means good teaching methods and learning materials for those who are sufficiently healthy to benefit from what is offered to them, in an environment that is conducive to learning. Schools that cannot provide basic amenities, such as proper toilets, clean water supply and play areas, cannot provide quality education, particularly for girls, whose educational prospects will suffer most.<sup>12</sup>
- > Donors should invest more in midwife training and retention, such as a US\$9 million UNFPA initiative that for five years will train midwives and support development of a midwifery standard and education system in 11 countries where maternal and newborn death and disability rates are highest.<sup>13</sup> High-level political commitment, both nationally and internationally, is required for more such programmes to address the global shortfall of skilled birth attendants.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Veneman, Ann, "Education Is Key to Reducing Child Mortality: The Link Between Maternal Health and Education," UNICEF, *UN Chronicle*. Volume XLIV, December 2007, [www.who.int/pmnch/topics/mdgs/2008unchronicle\\_aveneman.pdf](http://www.who.int/pmnch/topics/mdgs/2008unchronicle_aveneman.pdf) (accessed Aug. 3, 2009)

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, *Education for All: Global Monitoring Report 2009*, UNESCO, Paris, France, November 2008, [http://www.unesco.org/education/gmr2009/press/efagmr2009\\_Chapter1.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/education/gmr2009/press/efagmr2009_Chapter1.pdf) (accessed Aug. 3, 2009)

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO, *Inequality Undermining Education Opportunities for Millions of Children*, UNESCO, Paris, November 25, 2008, [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=44116&URL\\_DO=DO\\_PRINTPAGE&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=44116&URL_DO=DO_PRINTPAGE&URL_SECTION=201.html) (accessed Aug. 6, 2009)

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO, *Inequality...* (accessed Aug. 6, 2009)

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, *Inequality...* (accessed Aug. 6, 2009)

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO, *Inequality...* (accessed Aug. 6, 2009)

<sup>7</sup> UNFPA, *UNFPA's Contribution to the Goals of the World Summit for Children*, UNFPA, New York, May 2002, [www.unfpa.org/adolescents/future\\_generations/actions\\_education.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/adolescents/future_generations/actions_education.htm) (accessed Aug. 3, 2009)

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO, *Education for All...* (accessed July 23, 2009)

<sup>9</sup> UNFPA, "New UNFPA-Supported Initiative Expands Midwives' Efforts to Save Women and Newborns," press release, UNFPA, New York, Sept. 22, 2008 [www.unfpa.org/public/global/pid/1264](http://www.unfpa.org/public/global/pid/1264) (accessed Aug. 19, 2009)

<sup>10</sup> UNFPA, *Summary of ICPD Programme of Action*, UNFPA, New York, 1994, [www.unfpa.org/icpd/summary.cfm](http://www.unfpa.org/icpd/summary.cfm) (accessed Aug. 5, 2009)

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO, *Education...* (accessed Aug. 3, 2009)

<sup>12</sup> Veneman, Ann, "Education..." (accessed Aug. 3, 2009)

<sup>13</sup> UNFPA, "New UNFPA-supported..." (accessed Aug. 19, 2009)

<sup>14</sup> UNFPA, "No Woman Should Die Giving Life," UNFPA, New York, 2007, [www.unfpa.org/safemotherhood/mediakit/documents/fs/factsheet3\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/safemotherhood/mediakit/documents/fs/factsheet3_eng.pdf) (accessed Aug. 6, 2009)