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BACKGROUND

When You Educate a Girl, You Educate a Nation

Q: Why is Girls' Education important?

A: Education is vital to ensuring a better quality of life for all children and a better world for all people. But if girls are left behind, those goals can never be achieved. In country after country, educating girls yields spectacular social benefits for the current generation and those to come. An educated girl tends to marry later and have healthier children. The children she does have will be more likely to survive; they will be better nourished and better educated. She will be more productive at home and better paid in the workplace. She will be better able to protect herself against HIV/AIDS and to assume a more active role in social, economic and political decision-making throughout her life. UNICEF's aim is to get more girls into school, ensure that they stay in school and that they are equipped with the basic tools they need to succeed in later life.

Q: What is the status of Girls' Education in West Africa and Liberia?

A: The present ratio of girls to boys at the primary school level in Liberia is 40% to 59%, according to the Liberian Millennium Development Goals Report by the Ministry of Planning. In West & Central Africa, almost 1 out of every 2 children (45%), is out of school; most of these are girls in rural areas. 81% of children out of school have mothers with no formal education. The primary education net enrolment rate for the region is only 55%. The challenges of achieving the Millennium Development Goals related to universal primary education by 2015 are greatest in West & Central Africa. Millennium Development Goals 2 & 3: Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3 are related to girls' education and are inextricably linked. MDG 2 is the achievement of universal primary education: to ensure that by 2015 all children complete a full course of primary schooling. MDG 3, to promote gender equality and empower women, also has a vital

educational dimension; progress towards it means the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015. Universal primary education, by definition, cannot be reached without gender parity. And, gender parity in primary education is of limited worth if the participation of both girls and boys remain at low levels. This new policy is the first important step to eliminate an imbalance between girls and boys and having all children in school. This can only be good for Liberia.

Q: What are the goals of the Government of Liberia's Girls' Education National Policy?

A: The girls' education policy calls for:

- meeting Millennium Development Goal 2 by providing free and compulsory primary school and reducing secondary school fees by 50 percent;
- recruiting and training more female teachers;
- providing counselling in schools for girls;
- ending the impunity of teachers who commit sexual abuse and assault of students;
- offering Lifeskills at schools to raise the self-esteem so girls can say no to sexual abuse;
- increasing the availability of small scale scholarships for girls;
- strengthening health systems in schools;
- opening new parent teacher associations and girls clubs;
- and promoting adult literacy.

Q: Who is available for interviews about girls' education?

- Deputy Minister of Education Peter N. Ben, 06/523-274
- UNICEF Liberia Representative Angela Kearney, 06/538-298
- UNMIL Gender Unit, Joanna Foster, 06/560-458

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