

**DFID**

Department for  
International  
Development



# Girls' education: towards a better future for all

Summary version



## Why is girls' education important?

If all countries had reached the MDG target for 2005, more than a million childhood deaths a year could have been averted.

In September 2000, 188 heads of state from around the world signed the Millennium Declaration and established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While most goals aim to achieve significant progress in development by 2015, one goal was to be achieved by 2005 – as many girls as boys in primary and secondary education. But more than 75 countries are likely to miss this goal. We have fallen well short of our promise.

Women are at the heart of most societies, and mothers are very influential in their children's lives. Educating girls is one of the most important investments any country can make in its own future.

Education has a profound effect on girls' and women's ability to claim other rights and achieve status in society, such as economic independence and political representation. Having an education can make an enormous difference to a woman's chances of finding well-paid work, raising a healthy family and preventing the spread of diseases such as HIV.

**This paper sets out the UK's new plan to support girls' education. Over the next three years the Department for International Development:**

- plans to spend £1.4 billion on education in the developing world, to help get more girls into school; and
- will work with governments to remove the need for families to pay for children to attend school.

**'My education  
taught me to be  
myself and to  
have power over  
my life.'**

Yvonne Kapenzi, Zimbabwe (CAMFED)

## What is happening currently?

Girls' education has long been recognised as a human right. But even at primary school level, this right is being denied to 58 million girls, and a further 45 million boys.<sup>1</sup> More than 75 countries are likely to miss the 2005 MDG target for equal enrolment in primary and secondary school.<sup>2</sup> One-third of these countries are in sub-Saharan Africa. On current trends, more than 40 per cent of all countries in the world are at risk of not achieving the target at primary, secondary or both levels of education even by 2015.

Nevertheless, countries are making progress – sometimes dramatically so. In Bangladesh, equal numbers of girls and boys now enter secondary school, but in 1990 there were only half as many girls as boys in secondary education. Nepal has nearly nine girls for every ten boys enrolled in primary school, compared with seven girls for every ten boys in 1990.

<sup>1</sup> This figure refers to primary school enrolment only. The figures for girls who do not complete primary and do not enter secondary are higher.

<sup>2</sup> Reported figures exist for 128 countries. Figures for those in difficult environments are not readily available.

Girls are often the first to be taken out of school to provide care for sick family members or to take responsibility for siblings when death or illness strike.



## What's preventing girls from getting a good education?

There are a number of obstacles preventing more girls from getting a good basic education.

- **Educating girls is costly for parents**

The cost of education is the single biggest factor preventing families from sending girls to school. As well as having to pay for their children to attend school, parents are often faced with a number of other costs such as paying for secure transport to and from the school or ensuring their daughters are properly chaperoned.

- **Girls may face a poor quality and hostile environment**

Physical and sexual violence against women is common in many societies, and has been identified as a key barrier to girls' education in many DFID programmes. Families naturally want to protect their daughters from this type of abuse, and will prefer to keep them at home if they are concerned for their daughters' safety when travelling to, and at, school.

- **Women have a weak position in society**

Girls often have to overcome many obstacles within their communities before they can realise their right to an education.

In many instances, they have limited control over their futures and are often encouraged to marry young, particularly if the marriage can bring social or economic benefits to their family.

Early marriages lead to more adolescent pregnancies, which almost always result in girls halting their education. Girls are also more likely to drop out of school because of their responsibilities in the home.

- **Conflicts hurt girls most**

Girls are particularly vulnerable to abuse and unequal access to schooling in countries that do not provide security or basic services to the majority of their people. Of the 104 million children not in primary school globally, an estimated 37 million of them live in fragile states. Many of these children are girls.<sup>3</sup>

- **Social exclusion can affect girls**

Girls are more likely to be excluded from school on the basis of caste, ethnicity, religion or disability. The World Bank estimates that only about 1-5 per cent of disabled children and young people in developing countries attend school.<sup>4</sup> These groups are often not considered when policies are drawn up.

<sup>3</sup> Branchflower, Hennell, Pongracz and Smart. 2004

<sup>4</sup> Figures cited in S.J. Peters, *Inclusive education: An EFA strategy for all children*, World Bank, 2004

# What can be done to tackle girls' education on the ground? 5

For every problem, there are things that can be done. These include:

## **More political leadership and empowerment of women**

National leaders who speak out against gender inequality can have a significant impact. But political leadership needs to be accompanied by demand for change at the grassroots level and more effective leadership within communities and schools. Without this, new initiatives may have little support.

Having more female teachers can also help girls. Female teachers provide powerful role models, and can act as the catalysts for encouraging more girls to go to school.

## **Making girls' education affordable**

Removing school fees has resulted in a dramatic surge in enrolment of boys and girls in a number of African countries, such as Kenya. The removal of fees needs to be part of a comprehensive programme that combines reforming the education system with improving its quality.

## **Making schools work for girls**

A number of initiatives have been shown to influence parents who were debating whether or not to send their girls to school. These include:

- creating a better environment for girls by providing separate toilets, employing more female teachers, and providing curricula that are sensitive to the needs of girls;
- providing more boarding facilities for girls in communities that don't have a 'local' secondary school; and
- adopting more non-education programmes of support, such as providing all pupils with meals.

## **Charities, religious and other voluntary organisations are good for girls**

Networks of civil society organisations, such as the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), play an important role.

They use the media to highlight the problem of girls missing out on education, which in turn has galvanised the public to help raise more funds for girls' education, and to hold national and local leaders to account. In addition, they can play an important role as education providers, where state provision is inadequate.

**'We are three children in the family with only one very poor parent who is responsible for the whole family. So before I got the scholarship... I used to think about my problems all the time... I am now a happy child.'**

Ingabire Louise, Rwanda (FAWE)

## What more can the international community do?

### Provide more resources

The funding gap for education is currently in the region of \$5.6 billion (around £3 billion). This equates to an extra \$50 a year for each of the 104 million children currently out of school – or \$300 over six years of primary schooling.

Donors need to provide more money to ensure that the gap is filled.

### Find more effective ways to work together to promote girls' education

International leadership on girls' education is currently dispersed across a number of organisations who need to improve the way they work together. Multilateral organisations such as UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank don't always work together in an effective and consistent way.

In 2005, the UK is President of the G8 and co-chair of the Fast-Track Initiative – an initiative designed to provide countries with additional financing for education. We will use our influence in both of these positions to accelerate the progress that is being made towards achieving equal educational opportunities for girls.

Globally, three-quarters of the girls not attending school live in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia.



## What is the UK doing?

### **We are providing more money**

- Over the next three years, DFID plans to spend £1.4 billion on education to help get more girls into school.

### **We are stepping up our support to help reach countries where the gap is greatest**

DFID is:

- supporting UNICEF's efforts through the UN Girls' Education Initiative to co-ordinate global, regional and national action to speed up progress on girls' education in the 25 countries at greatest risk of not meeting the 2005 MDG; and
- stepping up its support for the global education partnership, the Education for All Fast-Track Initiative.

### **We are working with countries to implement effective solutions**

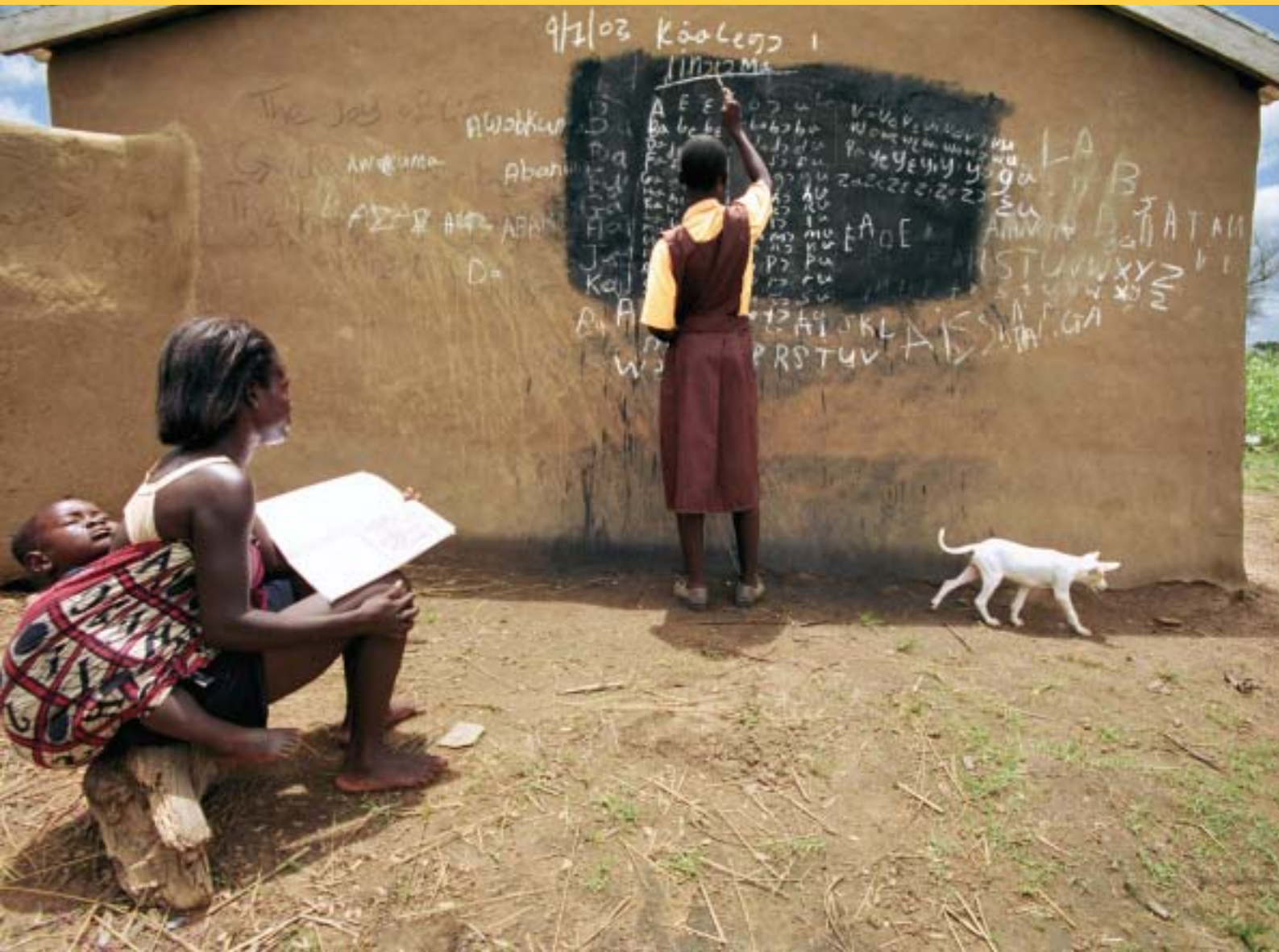
DFID is working with governments to:

- remove tuition fees and other barriers to accessing primary education;
- enable Ministries of Education to provide leadership and capacity to promote girls' education;
- strengthen community and parental participation in education;
- ensure appropriate measures are introduced to tackle abuse and violence towards girls and prevent the spread of HIV; and
- provide physical facilities such as clean water supply and sanitation facilities.

### **We are supporting civil society**

DFID is:

- providing support to regional civil society networks, including FAWE, to participate effectively in national decision-making processes; and
- ensuring that policy decisions are based on a sufficient understanding and knowledge of the issues.



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Front cover photo: A schoolgirl in Surinam. (© Ron Gilling/Still Pictures)

Inside front cover photo: A lesson at the Pahla Kadam residential camp school in Uttar Pradesh, India. The school offers an education to girls who are vulnerable to non-enrolment and early dropout. (© Ami Vitale/Panos)

Photo page 3: A girl at a government-run primary school in the village of Pindsawa, Uttar Pradesh, India. (© Ami Vitale/Panos)

Photo page 7: A South African girl at her high-school graduation. (© Giacomo Pirozzi/Panos)

Inside back cover photo: A girl does her homework on the blackboard painted on the wall of her house in Ghana. Her older sister, with baby on her back, checks her exercise book. (© Sven Torfinn/Panos)

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