



United Nations
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Organización
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para la Educación,
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Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

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Education of Girls and Women

Today, over 100 million children, 55% of which are girls, still do not have access to primary education.

As affirmed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "everyone has the right to education". UNESCO's Convention against Discrimination in Education underlines the need to promote equal opportunity and treatment. Education is a means of ensuring that girls and boys have an equal opportunity in life. Most of the 100 million children deprived of access to primary education are girls. Most live in Sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia and the Arab States. In rural Africa, about 70% of girls do not finish primary school. Women account for 64% of the adults worldwide who cannot read and write with understanding. Only 88 adult women are considered literate for every 100 literate adult men.



Village women in Panttit, Sudan peer through the school's window to watch their daughters in class.
(© UNICEF OLS/2004/Bonn)

exposed to exploitation and risks such as HIV and AIDS.

Addressing critical challenges and core issues are essential for increasing access to and completion of education for girls and women. Among these are:

- changing society's attitudes towards girls' education;

- increasing society's awareness of girls and women's rights and reflecting these rights in national legislation;

- raising the status of women in society by increasing the number of women

in decision-making positions;

- educating women so that as mothers they can sustain the education of girls in the long term;

- expanding early childhood education;

- encouraging girl-friendly schools.

UNESCO'S ACTIVITIES

UNESCO has invested energy in promoting equality between men and women over a long period of time. As a follow-up to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, UNESCO adopted a three-pronged strategy in 1995. This strategy is reflected in its Medium-Term Strategy for 2002-2007, which stipulates that the needs of women

A TOOL IN REDUCING POVERTY

When 189 Heads of State signed the Millennium Declaration in 2000, they recognized that educating girls is a powerful and necessary tool in reducing poverty and achieving human rights. 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. Educated mothers are more likely to send their girls to school, to look after the health of their families and have smaller families. Educated women are less likely to be

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Education For All

The Dakar Framework for Action (2000) explicitly mentions the issue of gender and girls' education (goals 2 and 5). Goal 2 indicates that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education. Goal 5 stipulates the elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and the achievement of gender equality by 2015.

Gender parity in access to schooling is the first step towards gender equality in education. *"Gender equality requires the achievement of equal outcomes for women and men, notwithstanding that they are starting from different positions of advantage, and are constrained in different ways"* (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4, *Gender and education for all: the leap to equality*).

According to the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, Literacy for life*, 49 countries had achieved gender parity in primary and secondary enrolment by 2002. However, the 2005 gender parity target has been missed by 94 countries (out of 149 with data), especially in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, 86 countries are at risk of not achieving gender parity even by 2015.

must be mainstreamed in all programme activities and projects.

UNGEI. UNESCO is an active partner in the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) launched in 2000 at the World Education Forum in Dakar. Its goal is to narrow the gender gap in primary and secondary education by 2005 and ensure that by 2015, all children complete primary schooling, with girls and boys having equal access to all levels of education. UNESCO is part of the Global Advisory Committee which aims to provide strategic guidance and to facilitate the development and implementation of the UNGEI strategies.

Regional networks and partnerships on gender issues in education. In 2002, UNESCO Bangkok facilitated the establishment of a regional network "Gender in Education Network in Asia" (GENIA) at the request of Member States. The main goal of this Network is to promote gender equality in education in terms of access, retention, performance and self realization through developing gender responsive education policies and challenging societal gender stereotypes. Fifteen countries are members of the Network, and nine receive specific in-depth support from UNESCO for gender capacity-building activities.

Empowerment of women in order to send girls to school. Household poverty is one obstacle to enrolment, transition and retention for girls and women. Poverty reduction programmes

are crucial to ensuring equitable and quality education with lasting results. Progress has been made through the introduction of income generating activities. UNESCO is supporting two programmes in rural areas in Niger and Burkina Faso aimed at empowering women, through sustainable literacy programmes and development of income generating activities. Experiences show that literate women are better at managing their micro-credit activities, have a greater capacity to participate in decision-making and have a better understanding of health care issues.

A skills-based literacy programme for women in China. About 36,000 women from Xuan Wei county have learned to read, write and calculate thanks to the course, and the female illiteracy rate has fallen by 29% compared with the average for the province. More than 300 technical training courses in 70 subjects have taught new skills to 275,000 women. The local authorities design and produce learning materials geared to local conditions, which also present positive images of women. The courses also include basic craft skills. Thanks to skills learned at women's literacy programmes, millions of rural women are now self-sufficient. UNESCO has been working with local people to enhance the quality of the programme through adding a component on information and communication technology.

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To Find Out More

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