



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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

**Message from Ms Irina Bokova,  
Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the International Day of the Girl Child**

*The Power of the Adolescent Girl: Vision for 2030*

**11 October 2015**

This year, the *International Day of the Girl Child* is inspired by the theme: *The Power of the Adolescent Girl: Vision for 2030*.

This is an invitation for the world to reflect on the importance of the empowerment of adolescent girls for the success of a new development agenda. I am convinced that the human rights and dignity of adolescent girls must be its starting point and the measure of its success.

Since 2000, major progress has been made in reducing gender gaps in primary enrolment in many of the countries where girls faced the worst disadvantage, but the poorest girls remain the least likely to enrol. Disparities widen in secondary education, with only 63% of countries having achieved gender parity at this level. Adolescence remains a vulnerable age, one where family poverty, discriminatory practices and concerns about school safety can cut short a girl's educational cycle. Over 32 million adolescent girls are out of school today, jeopardizing their future and development prospects.

Empowering girls is a development multiplier. A secondary education has direct impact on reducing early marriage, child and maternal mortality and nutrition. If effectively supported during adolescent years, girls can break intergenerational cycles of poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination, to become tomorrow's leaders, entrepreneurs, scientists, and mothers. For this, education is the best investment a society can make.

This is why gender equality stands at the heart of the new global agenda – as a fundamental human right and the foundation for more inclusive and sustainable societies.

UNESCO is acting on the ground across the world to promote girls and women's education; and encourage alliances with stakeholders from health, labour, social affairs and finance. This spirit guides the Joint Programme; "Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education," launched last March by UNESCO, with UN Women, the United Nations Population Fund and in partnership with the World Bank -- targeting adolescent girls from 20 countries, between the ages of 10 and 19, and young women, between the ages of 20 and 24 – those most at risk of discrimination and exclusion.

To succeed, we must also forge partnerships for innovation with the private sector – this underpins UNESCO's *Better Life Better Future Initiative*, where, for instance, we are working in Senegal and Nigeria, with Procter and Gamble, to provide literacy and skills to girls and women.

To succeed, I believe that the new sustainable development agenda must have the face of a 12 year old girl, in school, learning in a safe environment, not subjected to violence, not forced into early marriage, supported by her family and community.

This is the face of the future all societies need.

Irina Bokova