STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING GIRLS' SECONDARY EDUCATION:

A Look to the Future

While the majority of the examples in this publication are derived from sub-Saharan Africa, it is only because the problems in education are most acute there. Asia and the Middle East face similar issues, particularly in the rural areas. The benefits of secondary education for girls and the following strategies for attaining those benefits are applicable in all of these regions.

Many conditions are necessary to increase girls' enrollment, retention in, and completion of secondary school. Among them, two are key: political will and community involvement. Political will at all levels includes the willingness to build and sustain a strong commitment to ensuring that a high percentage of girls complete the primary cycle and transition to middle school. This political will must be translated into relevant action to create opportunities for girls to complete their secondary level education, thus taking them one step closer to fulfilling their potential.

In addition to political will, community involvement is necessary to ensure transparency, accountability, and sustainability of interventions. Community members, including parents, teachers, religious leaders, and students themselves, must be involved in the identification of barriers and solutions, as well as in the planning and implementation of strategies that advance girls' secondary education.

MEETING A KALEIDOSCOPE OF NEEDS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR GIRLS

Interventions must be designed to meet the needs in each country and some-times sub-regions within the country. The complexity of secondary girls' education and the range of potential interventions can be understood through the perspective of an African or South Asian girl. Her first challenge is access to a safe school where she can focus on her schooling without threat of violence, harassment, physical labor, gender discrimination, personal hygiene concerns, etc. Her second challenge is to find quality education that is purposeful, relevant, and meaningful so it will have value to the girl and her family as an end in itself. Finally, as education becomes more challenging and the obstacles become greater, as is the case for African and South Asian girls as they progress through the school system, girls must be given the motivation, through assurance of gainful employment for example, to continue despite family or societal pressure that may tell her that an education is of little value.

1. Short-Term—Increasing Access and Retention: Widening the Door to Secondary Education

There are a number of short-term strategies that countries, communities, and schools can put into place that will dramatically increase girls' access to, enrollment in, and retention in secondary school. These include building schools and equipping them with latrines and other necessities to eliminate a number of the barriers girls face.

Building secondary schools within a reasonable distance of every community

Building more secondary schools and providing access that does not require extensive travel or boarding would dramatically reduce concerns about cost and safety. While the intervention may be targeted at girls, boys would benefit as well. Avoiding high transportation costs or boarding fees makes attending secondary school less expensive and more cost effective for everyone, from those paying fees to the communities that lose revenue and consumers when much of their school-age population disappears to larger cities and towns to attend secondary school. Schools are also far more likely to enjoy more parental and community support and involvement when they are located closer to students' parents, thereby enhancing quality and accountability.

Latrines increase enrollment and retention for girls, as well as female teachers

Another infrastructure issue is the frequent lack of functional, clean, and separate toilets or latrines for girls and female teachers to use throughout the school day. Particularly during menstruation, this becomes a significant deterrent to girls' attendance at school, as well as leading to a loss of female teachers. Lack of separate, secure latrines also raises safety concerns for girls

when they are forced to share these facilities with male teachers or students. In Ethiopia, *The New York Times* reports:

> Fatimah is facing the onset of puberty, and with it the realities of menstruation in a school where there is no latrine, no water, no hope of privacy other than the shadow of a bush, and no girlfriends with whom to commiserate. Fatimah is the only girl of the 23 students in her class. In fact, she is one of only three girls in the school who have made it past third grade. Even the school's female teachers say they have no choice but to use the thorny scrub, in plain sight of the classrooms, as a toilet. 'It is really too difficult,' said Azeb Beyene, who arrived here in September to teach fifth grade. 'I decided right then I would leave.'[89]

The impact of safe, clean, accessible latrines in schools has been documented. UNICEF reports that from 1997 to 2002, enrollment rates for girls jumped 17 percent after improvements in school sanitation, and the dropout rate among girls fell by an even greater percentage.[90] In northeastern Nigeria, schools showed significant gains after funders built thousands of latrines, trained teachers, and established school health clubs.[91]

Creating a safe environment

For female students to feel safe in the school environment it is not only necessary for the community to acknowledge a harassment problem, it is also necessary to set up channels of reporting for students. Teachers also must be empowered to report such behavior and feel confident that appropriate action will be taken. Perpetrators must feel, from the community at large, that such behavior is socially unacceptable. One potential intervention is to train "safe teachers" to serve as resource persons to whom students can bring issues of harassment, verbal or physical abuse, learning/school environment, etc. Training can be provided for teachers, parents, students, and school administrators in the establishment of school counsels that act on reports of harassment, abuse, and environmental hazards that negatively affect student learning without jeopardizing the school's standing or reputation of the reporting student. An important part of this training would be the establishment of codes of conduct for schools and accompanying enforcement policies.

---

[89] LaFraniere, Sharon. "For girls in Africa, education is an uphill fight." The New York Times. 23 December 2005. Last accessed 15 June 2006. http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/12/22/news/ethiopia.php.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

2. SHORT-TERM AND MEDIUM-TERM — IMPROVING RELEVANCE/QUALITY/ PURPOSE: STAYING BEHIND THE DESK OF THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Once girls gain access to secondary school education, a major challenge for school completion is the quality and relevance of the education students are receiving. Girls often become discouraged or drop out of school not only for financial reasons, but out of frustration with a school environment where gender inequities prevail, classes are not participatory, teachers and teaching examples are biased towards males, and the curriculum is not relevant to their lives. For secondary educational quality and relevance to improve, governments, international donors, and communities must invest in gender-responsive educational reform which incorporates curriculum reform; teacher training reform, a student-centered learning process and inquiry-based teaching, school management reform, gender equity in the classroom and school, and a gender-based violence-free school environment.

Promoting student-centered, gender-sensitive learning

Training teachers in participatory methods of learning not only increases students' learning abilities but also increases their involvement in building their knowledge and likelihood of staying in school. As teachers learn to engage female students, students are more likely to feel that there is a purpose to continuing in school. Communities and schools can promote student-centered methods of learning by organizing workshops for teachers and school directors on strategies of teaching (group/team work, students' presentation, group research, or individual research) that encourage classroom participation, as well as regular follow-up to ensure that teachers are effectively integrating new tools and ensuring the full participation of every student in the classroom.

Seizing the opportunity for HIV-prevention education

Secondary school offers a key opportunity for providing HIV-prevention and AIDS mitigation education to girls and boys. Not only is repeated exposure to healthy behavior messages important, but this is a key age for students to receive reinforcement and guidance in translating that information into action. Through the Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program, AED's 37 local implementing partners have adopted a variety of approaches to HIV-prevention education, ranging from peer education, theater, school-based AIDS clubs, open discussions during mentoring sessions, and inviting community members living with HIV to speak to scholarship recipients about their experiences. Family Health International recently published a working paper highlighting the common characteristics of effective HIV education programs, based on a study of 83 evaluations of such programs. Among other attributes, effective

curricula, "created a safe environment for youth, focused on clear goals of preventing HIV/STI and/or pregnancy, focused on specific behaviors leading to these health goals, and gave a clear message about those behaviors."[92]

Increasing relevance: Teaching life skills

In terms of curriculum content, investment in gender-sensitive life skills materials, based on a 4th R in education, *responsible behavior*, must be a part of any educational reform efforts. Life skills learning materials should address local conditions and teach girls and boys responsible behavior, critical thinking, problem-solving, self-management, and interpersonal skills to allow them to acquire valuable knowledge and make positive decisions for themselves, their families, and their communities. Many schools are designing life skills programs that not only attract girls, but also keep them until they complete their studies. At Taibah Primary and Secondary School in Uganda, they "have a personal development curriculum which teaches self-awareness and communication skills and covers matters of sex, AIDS, infatuation, and use of contraceptives," says Education Director Mariam Luyombo. "As a result, we hardly have any girl who doesn't complete school."[93]

AED's life skills lessons in Mali were welcomed by teachers, principals, and parents alike. Many parents expressed increased willingness to send their girls and boys to school and keep them in school as a result of the introduction of the life skills educational materials into the classrooms because of their relevance to the daily lives of the Malian communities. Life skills materials teach health, hygiene, HIV/AIDS, agricultural, environmental, and economic topics that are fully relevant to the priority needs of the communities, and promote practical skills and behavior change among students. These practical lessons skills also could be used to assist parents and community members outside of school.

3. LONG-TERM — PROMOTING MOTIVATION: ENSURING A PAYOFF

The lack of access to employment opportunities after graduation is a significant long-term barrier to the survival and completion of secondary school by girls. Many girls in their final year of secondary school, especially African and South Asian girls, believe that if they cannot find a job and earn an income, their education was useless. Employment opportunities in many countries are

92 Kirby, Laris, and Lori Roller. "Youth Research Working Paper No. 2: Impact of Sex and HIV Education Programs on Sexual Behaviors of Youth in Developing and Developed Countries." Family Health International, 2005.

93 Kirungi, Fred. "Uganda Tackling School Bottlenecks." Africa Recovery Online: A United Nations Publication." Last accessed 15 June 2006. http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/vol14no2/uganda.htm.

often severely limited, even for secondary school graduates. Men are given job preference either by employers or by self-selection based on perceptions about traditional male- or female-appropriate jobs. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reports that: "Youth unemployment rates are high—56 percent in South Africa, 34 percent in Jamaica—and almost everywhere at least double the adult average. In many developing countries, gender discrimination in education and job opportunities results in higher unemployment among young women."[94]

This lack of education limits many young people's employment prospects, especially women's, to poorly paid and often unsafe work as domestic servants, agricultural laborers, or factory workers. In 2005, UNFPA reported that: "When they are employed, substantially more women than men work in the informal sector, which tends to offer lower wages, with less regulation, safety, and security. Women represent about two-thirds of self-employed entrepreneurs in the informal sector."[95] Since these jobs do not require extensive education, they do not motivate investments in education at the individual, familial, or community level. More skilled, advanced job opportunities—often thought of as "non-traditional" for women—must be provided to encourage and motivate girls' education at the advanced levels where it becomes more challenging and rigorous, financially and intellectually. The inability to directly translate secondary education into a consistent economic return represents perhaps the biggest barrier to secondary education for girls.
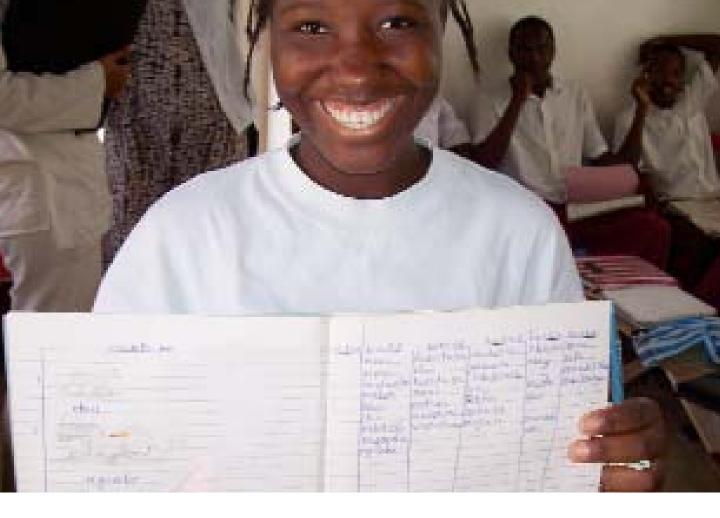
Providing additional training to girls

One approach to addressing this challenge is to provide additional guidance to girls outside of school hours on specific academic topics to ensure their success and to maintain their motivation to stay in school. In addition to tutoring, meetings could include training in job-related skills for upper secondary school girls and presentations by well-known community members, such as women leaders, on the importance of education. Participation in such clubs also could serve to encourage parents to see that the cost of sending their girls to school is worthwhile because the community is committed to providing opportunities to girls.

---

94 UNFPA. "State of the World Population 2003: Overview of adolescent life: education and unemployment." United Nations Population Fund. 2003. Last accessed 15 June 2006. http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2003/english/ch1/page5.htm.

95 UNFPA. "State of the World Population 2005: Strategic investments: the equality dividend." United Nations Population Fund. 2005. Last accessed 15 June 2006. http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/english/ch2/chap2_page1.htm.

96 Through the SAGE Guinea project, implemented by AED and funded by USAID.

Promoting motivation: Role models inspire girls

To address the lack of career role models for girls in many developing countries, AED designed women's role model calendars in Guinea (2002 and 2003)[96], Afghanistan (2005)[97], and Burundi, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, and Uganda (2006).[98] In Afghanistan, 12 inspirational women were chosen for the calendar from the education, health, culture, and community development sectors. The 12 women in the calendar are intended to serve as role models for Afghan girl students who hope to remain in school, pursue a higher education, and become involved in the community. They also have the potential to serve as role models to encourage male students to respect and value women. Local implementing partners selected the 12 role models from different sectors in each of the five countries noted. The resulting calendars will be used as teaching materials by mentors and teachers, creating a forum to discuss the common challenges faced by young women in pursuing their education, and encouraging scholarship recipients to remain committed to completing their studies.

---

97 Through the Afghanistan Teacher Training Program, implemented by AED and funded by the American Red Cross/America's Fund for Afghan Children.

98 Through the USAID-funded AED's Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program.