

# The Power of a Basic Education



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## The Current State of Education

At the 2000 World Education Forum in Senegal, 164 nations committed to work together to achieve goals that improve all aspects of education and achieve Education for All (EFA) by 2015. These commitments made—have already begun to show progress in reducing the number of primary

children that still do not receive an education most likely live in rural areas and come from the poorest households. They are also the children that most likely live in Sub-Saharan Africa or South and West Asia—home to more than three-quarters of the total population of primary-school age students out of school. More than half of the primary-school aged children not in

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school age children not enrolled in school. Between 1999 and 2004, the number of students fell from around 113 million to 77 million. At almost the same time, total aid toward basic education in low-income countries almost doubled.

Although the numbers show progress, the majority of the 77 million primary-school aged chil-

school are girls and of that number, 70% belong to marginalized or excluded groups.

In order to reach the Education for All goals by 2015, the most marginalized populations need to be addressed along with strategies and policies that can reach everyone. For developing nations, it means prioritizing the achievement of quality, universal primary education and reaching out to those children that historically have the

greatest difficulty accessing education. For rich countries like the United States, governments need to close the funding gap that is needed to achieve EFA and ensure that all nations, but especially low-income countries, have support for long-term strategies by providing high-quality, predictable aid.

## Why Educate?

The benefits of education in developing countries are widely known. Economists have demonstrated the importance of education in increasing workforce productivity, contributing to household incomes, enhancing political participation, reducing social inequality, and promoting natural resource preservation. We know that education plays a critical role in economic growth of nations. Primary education, in particular, has been singled out by the World Bank as the largest contributing factor to economic growth in Asia's newly industrialized economies. Other evidence points to universal enrollment in basic ed-

## Education can change lives

- Young women's earnings will be 10-20% higher for every year of school completed.
- An extra year of a woman's education has been shown to reduce the risk that her children will die in infancy by 5-10 percent.
- Girls' education is the best single policy for reducing fertility and therefore achieving smaller and more sustainable families.
- Education is a powerful vaccine against HIV and AIDS. Seven million cases of HIV/AIDS could be prevented in the next decade if every child received an education.
- A child born to a literate mother is 50% more likely to survive past the age of 5 years.
- Children with educated mothers are twice as likely to go to school and are less malnourished.



education as a critical precondition of sustained economic growth in the world's most prosperous nations, as well as the importance of attaining a critical threshold of education before a country can experience accelerating growth. Almost every definition of poverty requires an acknowledgement of the value of education in enhancing human capabilities and freedoms, improving participation in development processes, contributing to economic growth, and in improving livelihood security.

The particular gains of educating girls are well documented. In fact, economists at the World Bank have argued that girls' education provides the single highest return on investment in the developing world. An educated girl is less likely to become infected with HIV. She is more likely to have fewer children and bear them later in life, to participate in political processes, to earn more, and to raise healthier, educated children.

## Focusing on Marginalized Populations

Girls from marginalized and excluded groups (economically, ethnically, geographically, and/or linguistically groups with less power and influence) suffer disproportionately. Nearly three-quarters of girls out of school



come from excluded groups, even though these groups represent only 20 percent of the world's population. As international attention turns toward the importance of education in promoting security, enhancing governance, reducing poverty, and decreasing inequality, funding for educational initiatives has increased. However, the most marginalized groups are at a great risk of being excluded from these benefits.

Often dismissed as too costly or without political benefit, education for marginalized populations receives only cursory reference and little attention is given to figure out how to

improve systematic responses to the needs of these learners. This leaves these last-and-hardest-to-reach caught in systems that consistently do not adequately address their special needs.

CARE's explicit focus on social justice and poverty eradication require attention to these excluded populations—both because denial of education traps these vulnerable populations in cycles of poverty and because societies with higher inequality are less likely to achieve economic growth.

At greater risk of neglect and abuse, girls are particularly vulnerable in these situations. Gender equity in educational systems is a far-off target in most countries. Almost sixty percent of children out of school are girls, and of those who are in school, their achievement rates are most often below their male classmates. Because education for girls brings tremendous dividends for her and her family in the long run, an investment in girls' education is truly an investment in the development of a country. Although demographic surveys from around the world show us that countries most often close the gender gap in education among populations before those gaps posed by geographic differences, ethnicity, or family income, the known benefits of educating girls means that targeting

## Who are Marginalized Populations?

Learners who fall into this group are not homogenous. However, they often share a combination of some of the following characteristics:

- Physical Isolation (living in remote or poorly served regions, or living with disabilities that limit their mobility)
- Social Isolation (as members of ethnic and linguistic minority groups, lower castes, and/or the poorest socio-economic groups)
- High Workloads (carrying high domestic workloads, or engaged in economic activity)
- Chronic Insecurity (living in conflict settings, victims of acute natural disasters, or suffering from food shortages)
- Early Motherhood (either children of young mothers or young mothers themselves)
- Poor Health Status (both mental and physical health, being susceptible to abuse and disease)

girls in marginalized groups can boost the speed at which other gaps are closed.

## CARE's Education Work

Currently, CARE has Education programming in 36 countries. Over the last decade, CARE has built a reputation as a recognized player in the education sector whose rights-based

### CARE's Education Work

Currently, CARE's Education programming prioritizes work around four subsets of marginalized populations who are affected by:

- Child labor,
- HIV and AIDS,
- Gender disparity (particularly girls); and
- Emergencies and conflict.

approach aligns it with the Education for All (EFA) goals. During this time, a significant proportion of CARE's education work has been centered on assisting marginalized groups, which are disproportionately comprised of girls, to improve their access to and quality of education. Because of a complex interplay of geographic, economic and social factors, these marginalized groups have been denied quality basic services. For children, this has meant that they have either not been included in schools, have grossly underachieved, or have dropped out altogether.

CARE's work in the education sector over the last decade and a half has increasingly helped to define CARE's niche as working with marginalized groups to ensure their right to quality basic education. In particular, CARE plays a role in promoting strategies to improve educational achievements for the traditionally most excluded groups (often called the most marginalized, excluded groups, the



ultra poor, or the "last and hardest to reach"). Inherent in this role is demonstrating that these learners can be reached in ways that create efficient, important and long-term investments in educational systems.

## Key Recommendations

**Ensure high quality, predictable aid to achieve Education For All:** Global development aid for basic education in poor countries has increased steadily, but remains at relatively low levels of \$2.4 billion in 2004-2005 or 2.2% of total ODA. Substantial increases in aid for basic education will be needed in order to provide a good quality education for the estimated 77 million children who are still out of school. An estimated \$8-15 billion per year is needed to provide every child in every country a basic quality primary school education. In 2005, G7 leaders promised to provide their fair share to reach universal primary education by 2015. In response, last year, the UK government announced a commitment of US\$15 billion over ten years for education in poor countries. Accordingly, the UK expects to provide approximately US\$1.5 billion per year. The United States is more than \$2 billion short on living up to their fair share—and now spend one-third less as much as Great Britain—even though the US economy is six times larger. While the United States has gradually increased its commitment to education in recent years—spending approximately US\$460 million on basic education in 2006, the

US should demonstrate leadership by providing its fair share of at least US\$2.0 billion per year.

**Equity for all learners:** All learners have the right and ability to achieve basic education competencies. National and International governments need to have policies and funding mechanisms that address the most marginalized children who are most often girls. When systems are improved to provide quality education to marginalized children, educational content, learner preparedness, accountability, educational processes, school environment, governance and learning outcomes are all enhanced. Therefore, all children benefit from a focus on these most marginalized children. Inclusion and educational success of vulnerable populations requires work at multiple levels (i.e., individual, family, community, systems, and advocacy levels) and an aggressive, proactive approach is needed to secure equitable access to quality education, especially for historically excluded groups where the benefits of education is one of the greatest tools to help break generational cycles of poverty.

