DECENT WORK

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International Labour Organization

Formula for progress: Educate both girls and boys!

Decent childhoods and child labour

Childhood is a vulnerable phase in the life cycles of women and men. Considering the care that children need—ranging from health and nutrition to education—childhood can be a major challenge, especially in impoverished rural or urban areas.[1] There is a universal understanding and internationally shared vision that education for all is the key to development. For the estimated 218 million children engaged in child labour, access to quality education is the pathway to a better life.

Granted, the rise in the number of children entering primary school is promising. Primary school enrolment rose from 647 million to 688 million worldwide between 1999 and 2005, increasing by 36% in sub-Saharan Africa and 22% in South and West Asia.[2] As a result, the number of out-of-school children declined from 96 million in 1999 to 72 million in 2005, with the pace of this decrease particularly marked after 2002.[3]

However, one of the biggest obstacles to decent childhoods —whether physical or intellectual—is having to work. Parents living in poverty often face a choice between educating their children or sending them to work in order to help support the family. In other cases, access to education may in itself present a challenge. Children may have to walk long distances to reach schools. They may face inadequate quality of education, poor physical facilities, little or no sanitation and a lack of study materials. Teachers may receive little support, training, or pay. And school fees, textbooks and uniforms may be prohibitively expensive.

In some parts of the world, the situation is even more daunting. In conflict or post-conflict situations education may simply be unavailable. Or children may have to balance school and work. School enrolment does not necessarily equal school attendance. In rural areas, for example, crop and harvest cycles may dictate when children have to work, often in hazardous conditions. If these children are attending classes, their studies inevitably suffer and some children drop out of schools. In urban areas where nearly half of the world's population already lives, children are particularly susceptible when not in school to engage in dangerous and illegal activities.

Young musician begging in Warsaw, Poland.

1 According to the Millennium Development Goals Report of 2007, estimates of 2005 indicated that over 10 million children died before their fifth birthday, mostly from preventable causes.

2 *2008 Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, UNESCO and Oxford University Press, p. 1.

3 ibid. p. 49.

Gender and education

Primary school in partnership with IPEC, Sialkot, Pakistan.

Of all the children in the world, fully half—girls—are more vulnerable than boys. Despite increasing international recognition that the education of girls is one of the most powerful tools for progress, girls suffer from discrimination when it comes to getting an education. The *2007 Education for All Global Monitoring Report* indicated that of the 72 million primary school age children out of school, 44 million are girls. Yet favouring boys over girls in education makes no sense. Empirical evidence from a range of countries has shown that educating girls is one of the most effective ways of fighting poverty. Failure to educate girls costs developing countries US$92 billion a year.[4] Educated girls are more likely to have better income as adults, marry later, have fewer and healthier children and stronger decision-making power within the household. Importantly, they are also more likely to ensure that their own children are educated, avoiding future child labour.

Experts have stressed that educating girls paves the way for wider changes in the families, societies and work places. A number of studies have also made strong links between enhanced educational access for girls and GDP growth. In general, more girls at school means higher educational performance for everyone. So why does the number of girls in school still lag behind boys in several regions of the world?

Gender relations determine the development of boys and girls in many ways. In some cultures that overtly favour boys, sex-selective abortion and female infanticide are practiced. Nutritious food and vital health care may be denied to girls in the poorest strata of society. This is corroborated by statistics indicating "missing" girls in China, South Asia and North Africa.[5]

When families have limited resources, they may feel they have to choose between educating their sons or daughters. Decisions may not be based on natural aptitudes, skills, or the motivation levels of either the male or female child. Age-old patriarchal traditions, religious interpretations, existing gender role models based on male superiority and inheritance laws, and the invisibility of women's work may compound justifications for choosing to educate boys.

Unequal gender relations propel a vicious circle of underinvestment in girls from generation to generation, starting at the earliest stages of their lives and continuing throughout their life cycles. Today, over two-thirds of the world's 860 million illiterates are women. Girls take on a great deal of unpaid household work for their families, including childcare, cooking, cleaning, and gathering water and fuel.[6] Many girls in poor communities are expected to contribute to household income. If girls are attending school, there is precious little time for study. They may also be pushed into work as domestic labourers or other forms of work, even trafficking and prostitution.[7]

These predetermined gender roles may not necessarily benefit young boys either, and may even be harmful. From a young age they may feel a heavy burden to perform academically - perhaps beyond their capacities – in order to live up to their families' expectations to succeed. Boys are more likely to repeat grades and leave school at a younger age than girls, a situation causing rising concern.[8] According to UNICEF, poor boys in Chile are four times more likely to drop out of school and enter the workforce than poor girls.[9] Boys often end up in physically demanding, dirty and dangerous jobs after leaving school.

The first step towards achieving equality of outcomes is gender parity, or the equal participation of both sexes at different levels of education. Gender parity in primary education has been achieved in 118 countries, but many of these countries have had compulsory, free and enforced education for decades. Only about one-third of countries reported parity in both primary and secondary education in 2005, with only three reaching it since 1999. And while all countries had pledged to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, according to the *2008 EFA Global Monitoring Report,* 54 countries fell short of the mark.

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4 See www.plan-international.org/news/girlseducation

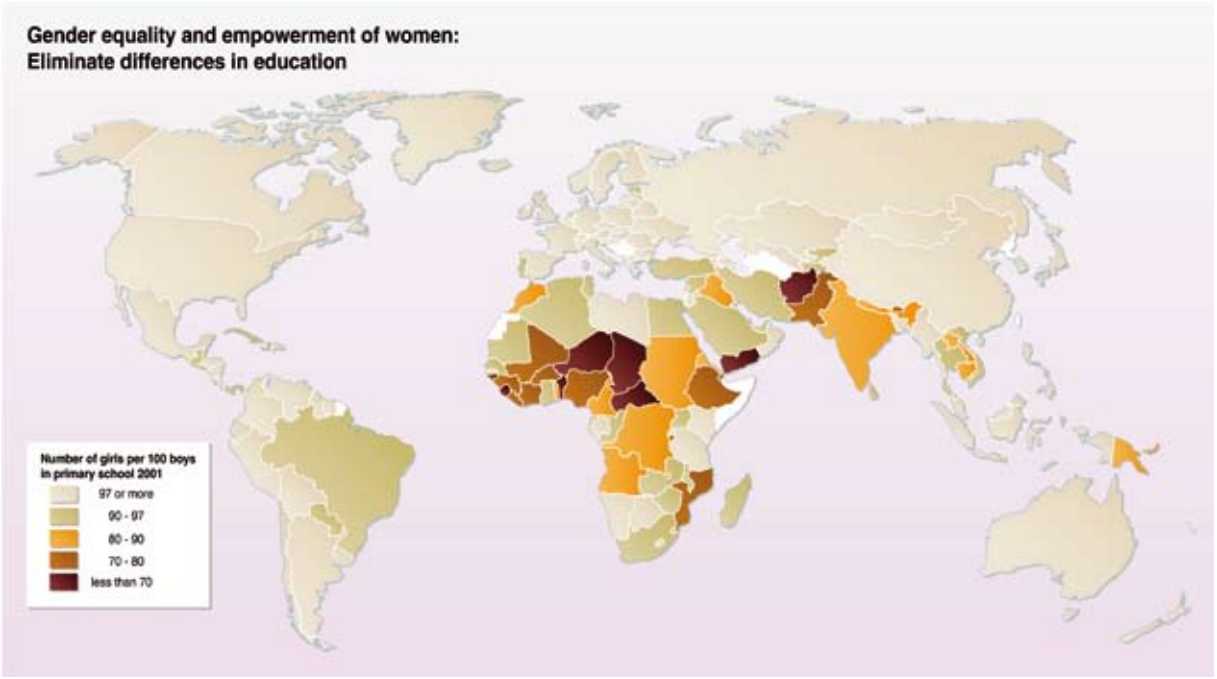
5 In the early 1990's, Amartya Sen, the Nobel laureate, raised international interest on the number of missing girls and women. In China, for example the male to female birth ratio is 1.18 to 1, as opposed to the standard ratio of 1.03 –1.07 to 1. *Newsweek,* 17 March 2008, p. 28.

6 It is still difficult to capture the additional burden carried out by girls in household chores, which are not easy to count, thus not yet fully integrated in the analysis of child labour data. The ILO is currently investigating methodologies for capturing household chores performed by girls and boys in their own homes.

7 Of an estimated 8.4 million girls and boys in unconditional worst forms of child labour in 2002, an estimated 1.2 million children were trafficked. Children are trafficked into forced and bonded labour situations, organized begging, work on plantations (mostly boys) and commercial sexual exploitation (mostly girls).

8 *2008 Education for all Global Monitoring Report,* op.cit., p. 84.

9 ibid., p. 84.



Note: The indicator is "Ratio of girls gross enrolment ratios to boys gross enrolment ratios" (indicator 9). Countries with no figure for 2001 have been approximated with the next latest available year. Source: UN Millennium Development Goal Indicators Database (UNESCO). http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/ (Accessed August 2005)

Notwithstanding, MDG 2 of achieving universal primary education has had a positive impact on girls moving out of work – whether paid or unpaid - and into school. The abolition of school fees in a number of countries has contributed to closing the gender gap. In Kenya and Tanzania, enrolment increased by 18% and 23% respectively, including newly enrolled girls.

Still, gender parity is not the same as gender equality, which requires equal outcomes for women and men. Inequalities arise from unequal power relations between women and men, and hence assessments of progress towards gender equality need to establish whether the changes being achieved are significantly altering these relations. According to the EFA Report, textbooks often show stereotyped occupational roles. In some countries, men are shown dominating commercial occupations, with not a single woman shown in these roles. Teachers often perpetuate gender biases as well, following the examples in the books. Rural teachers in Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda had low expectations of female students and gave more attention to boys. Education sows the seeds of gender equality leading to equal employment opportunities in occupations that are not segregated by sex. Failure to do so will impact future directions for women's empowerment and employment.

Incentive Schemes for Educating Girls

There are many barriers to girls' access to school. Poor understanding of child labour situations could also lead to poor interventions from a gender angle, even with the best of intentions. In some cases, for example, girls were overlooked when child labour projects were designed for mining districts. Programmes supporting the withdrawal of boys from mines ended up ignoring girls engaged in hazardous work in and around the mines. As a result, girls missed out on the benefits and the support mechanisms brought by certain projects.[10]

To provide incentives for girls' education various schemes have been developed in poor communities. These include cash transfers to help mothers to keep children out of work and in school, scholarships, teacher stipends, food products for parents, in-school feeding programmes, free textbooks and uniforms, back-to-school camps and bridging programmes for girls. In some communities subsidised childcare centres near schools have eased girls' sibling care burdens, and in others, life skills courses for teenage mothers have enabled them to continue to access education.

Such incentives can be used alone, or when combined can have an even greater impact on increasing the enrolment and retention of girls in school and reducing child labour.

[10] GENDER/IPEC, ILO, *Girls in mining: Research findings from Ghana, Niger, Peru and the United Republic of Tanzania,* Geneva, 2007.

POTENTIAL OF CONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFERS

Conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes typically provide a certain amount of cash to poor households on a regular basis on condition that the beneficiaries fulfill some obligation(s) aimed at human development, such as sending their children to school or participating in health, nutrition and information programmes. Pioneered by Brazil and Mexico in the mid-1990s, CCT programmes have been most prevalent in Latin America where virtually all countries now boast of some such scheme.[a]

So far, impact evaluations have shown that CCTs are effective in substantially increasing households' use of schools and health services, and evidence suggests enormous potential for bridging gender gaps by giving families financial incentives to invest in their girls. For example, Mexico's *Oportunidades* programme pays higher cash transfers to mothers for girls' enrolment while Bangladesh' Female Secondary School Stipend programme gives money directly to girls, conditional upon their enrolment in secondary school and remaining unmarried until age 18. In Cambodia and Pakistan, scholarship programmes give families cash transfers provided their daughter enrols in secondary school.[b] Brazil's *Programa de Erradicaçao do Trabalho Infantil* (Programme for the Eradication of Child Labour), or *PETI*, remains the sole example of a major CCT programme in the world whose foremost objective is to reduce child labour. It is now being gradually incorporated into the national CCT programme *Bolsa Família.*

[a] *IPEC Action Against Child Labour 2006-2007: Progress and future priorities*, ILO, Geneva, p. 81
[b] Sinha, Nistha, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network (PREM) accessed on World Bank website: http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTGENDER

ILO AND PARTNERSHIPS

Pupils of the local school reading books bought by the ILO, Mollehuaca, Peru.

Employers have been playing a fundamental role at different levels in fighting child labour. At the workplace, they can refuse to hire children or, if child labour already occurs, they can remove the children making sure this is done in a responsible manner. At the political level, employers and employers' organizations can lobby for effective training and education systems for both girls and boys. The ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities has been running a gender-sensitive technical cooperation programme, funded by the Norwegian Government, aimed at building the capacity of employers and their organizations in combating child labour.[11]

Workers' organizations are also logical leaders in combating child labour at the local, national and international levels. With appropriate interventions, unions can become credible advocates for the protection of children against exploitation and abuse. They promote the right of workers to adequate remuneration, thereby reducing the dependence of poor families on their children's labour. In addition to bargaining on behalf of their adult members, workers' organizations can further mobilize to ensure that children are in school, not in the workplace. The ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities has also been conducting technical cooperation programmes to intensify the efforts of workers' organizations to fight child labour, and has been paying attention to the gender dimension as well.[12]

The ILO's prime contributor on child labour issues is its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC). It has also consistently worked on the gender dimensions of child labour with support from the ILO Bureau for Gender Equality. Through research, technical cooperation and policy advice, ILO-IPEC has been guiding ILO constituents to develop gender sensitive strategies for education as part of the policies to combat child labour. Good practices from IPEC projects show that gender sensitive measures to improve skills, vocational training and education, coupled with measures to improve self-confidence of girls and mothers is very effective in combating child labour. The 12 June 2008 *World Day Against Child Labour* has given the ILO the opportunity to highlight its many international partnerships on education. The ILO is a core member of the *Global Task Force on Child Labour and Education for All* (GTF), which has gender equality high on its agenda.

[11] see www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actemp/projects/index.htm
[12] see www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actrav/genact/child/part1_a/intro1.htm

The *Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel* (CEART) has been active in the promotion of female teachers. The ILO is supporting efforts to encourage the education of girls through the work of the *United Nations Girls Education Initiative* (UNGEI).

Non-formal education may also be an important contribution to preparing children to catch up on schooling or absorb important life skills. These may take the form of "equivalency" programmes and transitional assistance, such as those promoted and documented by UNGEI. In other cases, programmes have been developed to improve children's life skills for livelihood support and food security. FAO, an ILO partner in combating child labour in agriculture, promotes *Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools* (JFFLS), especially targeting HIV/AIDS orphans and girls. To date, over 10 000 girls and boys in southern and eastern Africa have acquired new skills for farming, income-generation, proper nutrition, the value of medicinal plants, heath and hygiene, biodiversity and natural resource conservation.

REAL VOICES[13]

© Courtesy: UNGEI

At thirteen, Suriah left her Indonesian village to go to Jakarta as a domestic worker, determined to help her family make ends meet. Every day – from 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. – Suriah worked. She woke up before the sun rose and cooked breakfast, transported children to school and returned to interminable housework. After dinner, her evening was a tiring echo of her morning routine. She washed the dishes and made sure the children were in bed on time. When the clothes were dry, she ironed and put them away. By late evening she had just enough energy left to fall into bed. Suriah returned to her village after a few years, enrolled in catch-up classes and attended non-formal junior high school classes. Suriah experienced some of the conditions that render child domestic labour one of the worst forms of child labour. Too often, these conditions include: excessive working hours; no rest time or rest day; no or limited remuneration; exposure to safety and health hazards; abuse and exploitation; bonded labour; or trafficking.[14]

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Much action has already been taken to effectively combat child labour and to promote education for all children, yet much work remains to be done. Because of the lower social status of girls and women in most societies and the direct and indirect discrimination that they experience, it is recommended that specific measures be taken to include facilitating access to education for girls in national plans, policies and programmes.

Other steps that can be taken:

- Ratifying and implementing ILO Conventions No. 138 on the minimum age for employment and No. 182 on combating the worst forms of child labour and ensuring that national actions on combating child labour and its worst forms also include girls;
- Providing a broader framework of equality – ratifying and implementing key ILO Conventions such as Convention No. 111 on Ending Discrimination in Employment and Occupation, No. 100 on Equal Remuneration, Convention No. 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities and Convention No. 183 on Maternity Protection;
- Encouraging governments to work with employers' and workers' organizations in tackling child labour;

A football match between two girls' teams symbolizes giving the "red card to child labour" at World Day Against Child Labour, Geneva, 12 June 2006.

[13] East Asia and Pacific Regional UNGEI, "Towards Equal Opportunities for All: Empowering Girls through Partnerships in Education", Bangkok, 2007, pp. 81-82.

[14] The ILO estimates that more girl children under 16 years of age are working in domestic services than any other category of work or child labour, which is among the most invisible of female-dominated occupations. Overwhelming numbers of children work in domestic service (nine out of ten are girls) in other people's homes along with uncounted number of children, mostly girls engaged in work in their own homes. These children enter domestic service at very young ages, most around 12-14 years of age but some as young as 5-7 years old. (Helping Hands or Shackled Lives: Understanding Child Domestic Labour and Responses to it, ILO Geneva, 2004).

- Recognizing the barriers to girls' education through properly considered and adequately resourced education policies and plans;
- Developing employment creation and income generation strategies for parents, while highlighting the benefit of education for girls for the whole family. Increasing a mother's income has been shown to have greater impact on getting children into school than increasing a father's income;
- Improving availability of affordable, quality childcare for young children to ease pressure on parents to take their children to work or assign the childcare to older girl siblings. Childcare will also reduce the demand for child domestic workers;
- Providing adolescent girls with quality formal and non-formal educational programmes, including vocational training, that would lead to their empowerment and to more opportunities for decent work in their adulthood;
- Addressing gender stereotyping in education leading to unchallenged views on occupational segregation and women's unpaid work, including through a gender analysis and reform of the education curricula;
- Encouraging girls to study subjects and skills that are in high demand and would command better pay in the labour market;
- Proposing that female dominated and male dominated occupations are evaluated so as to determine equal pay for jobs of equal value, thus contributing to gender non-discrimination in future employment;
- Ensuring the quality training and subsequent employment of adequate numbers of female teachers;
- Sharing international good practices on strategies to enrol and retain girls in school.

Primary school in partnership with IPEC, Dar es Salaam, U.R. Tanzania.

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Please contact us on gendercampaign@ilo.org for information on additional ILO themes addressed by this campaign.