

Fast-tracking Girls' Education

A PROGRESS REPORT BY THE EDUCATION FOR ALL – FAST TRACK INITIATIVE

This report is launched in 2011, which marks the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. On the first International Women's Day, women in most countries did not have the right to vote, and very few were encouraged to get an education, or could even afford to go to school. A century later, there have been vast improvements, but in developing countries, far too many girls are still not in school, and many girls face continuing health risks, harassment, and danger just walking to and from school.

International development assistance for basic education in the poorest nations is far below what is needed. After years of stagnation, aid to basic education has increased from US\$ 2.4 billion in 2008, to US\$ 3.8 billion in 2009, and global aid for education overall, increased from US\$ 5 billion in 2008, to US\$ 7.8 billion in 2009. This is an encouraging development, yet these levels are far from the US\$ 16 billion estimated by the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report as needed annually to achieve Education for All. Money for education is a good return on investment. A child born to a mother who can read, is 50 percent more likely to survive past age 5. Each extra year of a mother's schooling reduces the probability of infant mortality by 5–10 percent. In Africa's poorest states, an estimated 1.8 million children's lives could have been saved if their mothers had at least a secondary

education, according to UNESCO. And women with post-primary education are five times more likely than illiterate women to be educated on the perils of contracting HIV and AIDS. The international community needs to support girls' education in a harmonized, shared way, with country-owned coherent plans, like those centered in the EFA FTI partnership.

This report by EFA FTI senior researcher, Prema Clarke, publishes new and encouraging evidence of the EFA FTI partnership's impact in putting more girls into school, and keeping them in school.

Cutting development aid to education now would have a disastrous impact on girls and women. With less than four years till the deadline of the Millennium Development Goal calling for universal access to educational opportunities for both boys and girls, there is a compelling reason for the international community to give full political and financial support to girls' education. Investing in girls' education is smart economics—both for developing countries and international donors. Better educated young women lead to more stable families, communities, and nations.



Robert S. Prouty,

Head of EFA FTI Secretariat

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right—a vital resource in overcoming poverty and inequality globally. All children have the right to quality basic education, the bedrock for a productive life.

But key to this success is ensuring that girls, as well as boys, have full, equal access to a good quality education system which gives them knowledge and skills. Better-educated girls make better decisions at home, at work, and are better prepared as mothers to protect their children's health from chronic illnesses like HIV AIDS. Long-term, inequalities between girls and boys have significant negative impacts on societies and progress. Girls' education is fundamental to economic and social development of individuals, families, and nations.

For 20 years, the international community has committed to significantly expanding the education sector. A landmark effort has been the Education For All-Fast Track Initiative (EFA FTI).

The EFA FTI partnership of developing and developed countries, civil society groups, the private sector, and foundations forms the backdrop for putting together and implementing Education Sector Plans (ESPs).

The national ESPs have driven reform in a structured and comprehensive way. These plans help countries prioritise girls' education—emphasizing equal proportions of boys and girls entering the education system and completing primary school. Today, 43 developing countries are members of the EFA FTI partnership.

This report publishes new and heartening progress, showing the positive impact of the EFA FTI partnership on girls' education. FTI countries have enjoyed rapid increases in the numbers of girls attending school. In addition, the EFA FTI model has helped reduce the number of girls who previously needed to repeat a grade. This report details how EFA FTI has underpinned improvements in girls' education.

The report also warns of the remaining challenges, and the continuing need for the global community's sustained attention and financial commitment to basic education. Because today there are 67 million children still not in school—more than half of them girls.

Sustained donor and domestic support for girls' education in the poorest countries remains critical. This report calls on the international community to continue focusing on reducing numbers of out-of-school girls, improving learning outcomes, and tackling the chronic problem of girls not in school in fragile and post-conflict countries.

The author of this EFA FTI report is Dr. Prema Clarke, a long-time education researcher with extensive field experience in Africa, South Asia, and her native India; she was assisted by Juliette Wilson.