

Girls' education—the remaining challenges

The EFA FTI has played a transformative role in improving girls' education in developing countries. While further fine-tuning of the FTI design would be helpful, it is critical to continue bringing local education partners and governments together to jointly develop strategic plans and collectively chart clear directions for reform in girls' schooling. It will be important to help countries distil their implementation experiences, especially in slow performing cases, and to identify interventions that have had greater impact. These interventions would specifically address the constraints and limits unique to each country. Looking ahead, there are three areas which can expand the gains so far, and also tackle the challenges that remain.

1. Learning levels: While remarkable gains have been made in increasing access to schooling for girls, there is more work to be done to improve learning outcomes. Children in Grade 2 in Mali, Gambia, Nicaragua, Uganda, Liberia, and Honduras were tested on the number of words they could read. Significant numbers of children are unable to read a single word after several years of schooling. Overall levels of learning for both boys and girls are low. Improving education quality that can

build knowledge and skills will be the single greatest challenge in the coming decade.

In all *developed* countries, girls significantly outscore boys in reading at the primary level. *Nowhere is this true in FTI countries.* Comparative information on learning levels for boys and girls is available for a few FTI countries that appeared for SACMEQ tests (Table 4).³ In none of these countries do girls significantly outperform boys.

2. Out of school children: Though the overall trends in girls' enrollment are improving, out-of-school girls in at-risk communities are particularly vulnerable. This group includes girls who have never attended school, who attend sporadically, or who have permanently dropped out. Understanding the number and characteristics of girls who have never attended, temporarily, or permanently dropped out of the school system is critical. At-risk communities include girls in ethnically or socially marginalized groups, girls with mental and physical disabilities, working girls, and girls with HIV/AIDS. And girls living in extreme poverty are at particular risk. Addressing the needs of such girls must be the focus for action in the next decade.

3. Fragile and post-conflict countries: Fragile and post-conflict countries have joined EFA FTI, e.g., Haiti, Central African Republic, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, and others. Lack of physical infrastructure, scarcity of basic school supplies, and weak administrative capacity in these countries significantly challenge efforts made to improve girls' participation. Girls caught up in violent civil conflicts are highly disadvantaged. The effect of violence on girls' education is almost twice that of boys. When conflicts end, double the efforts are needed to draw girls into school. The immediate post-conflict period in these countries requires additional efforts to sustain the influence of the FTI process in initiating major reform.

Table 3: Learning levels for select Anglophone FTI countries

Country	Endorsement Year	2000		2007	
		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
<i>Reading Scores</i>					
Kenya	2005	546	547	544	542
Lesotho	2005	447	455	464	472
Malawi	2009	432	426	439	429
Mozambique	2003	518	514	478	473
Zambia	2008	440	447	437	432
<i>Mathematics scores</i>					
Kenya	2005	574	552	568	546
Lesotho	2005	446	448	477	477
Malawi	2009	438	428	453	441
Mozambique	2003	537	520	488	479
Zambia	2008	440	430	441	429

Source: SACMEQ 2002 and 2007

3. SACMEC stands for Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Quality Educational Quality

Girls' Stories—Ethiopia

Ethiopia's political leaders champion girls' education

Ethiopia's education sector plan was endorsed by the EFA FTI partnership in 2004. At that time, 45 percent of the girls in the 6 to 11 age group were not attending school.

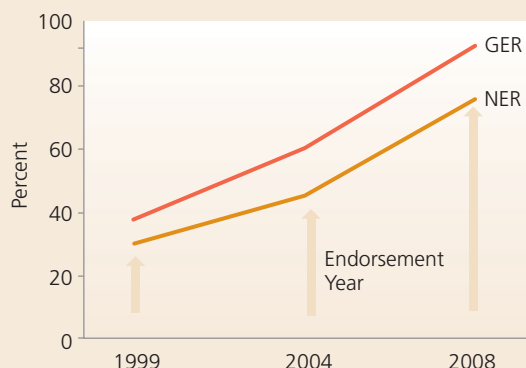
Increases in girls' education in the years before joining EFA FTI were encouraging. From 1999 to 2004, over a four-year period, the increase in girls' gross enrollment (GER) was about 31 percent. In contrast, after joining the FTI partnership, in the following four years, the increase in GER more than doubled to 92 percent. Girls' net enrollment (NER) also increased 39 percent, reaching 75 percent in 2008. Although completion rates are still too low, these have increased from 24 percent in 2004 to 43 percent in 2008.

Ethiopia's success in increasing girls' enrollment was grounded in its vision for all children to have access to quality education by 2015. The Education Sector Plan confirms Ethiopia's pledge to "take affirmative action to ensure equity in female participation... in all education and training programs and to increase their role and participation in development." EFA FTI provided the opportunity for partners to join in providing coherent support in implementing this vision.

Interventions outlined in the ESP to bring girls to school included:

- Publicity campaigns creating awareness at the regional level

Ethiopia—Increase in girls' participation



- Encouraging parents and government officials to monitor schools for violence against girls
- Providing sufficient toilets for girls and establishing "girls clubs" in schools
- Targeted recruiting of women as teachers and administrators
- Micro-level initiatives to address specific needs of girls-out-of-school
- Establishing a special day to celebrate girls
- Strengthening monitoring, and making the school system accountable for actions detrimental to the access and survival of girls



Giacomo PROZZI, UNICEF Niger