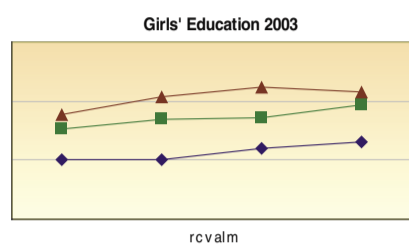


The third MDG seeks to promote gender equality and empower women. It aims to "eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education not later than 2015." Implicit to this target is the belief that poverty cannot be effectively addressed without successful achievement of the education

goal. Further it highlights the importance of women's education for the project's success. Can any of the goals be reached without progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women? Today, in the middle of 2005, progress in education shows the world still has a long way to go to implement the MDG goal on gender equality.

So much yet to learn about girls' education

By **Eileen Kane**, who established the first Department of Anthropology in Ireland and chaired the Irish Aid advisory program. Recently she has worked almost exclusively on issues related to girls' education for organisations such as the World Bank, UNICEF, USAID and various NGOs



Oh, yes, another diagram on girls' education. Not very clear, is it? I suppose that top line is boys' enrolment in school and the bottom is girls'. Or maybe that bottom line is sub-Saharan Africa? Or is it girls' enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa? One thing is for sure, whatever it is, the bottom line is probably girls. Or Africa. Poor rural girls in Africa, maybe. Yes. Then that middle line would have to be...

Actually, this is an imaginary diagram, designed to provoke thought among development practitioners – policymakers, managers, educators and researchers. Yes, it is on girls' education, but a different aspect – "How Much Evidence Do We Have About Girls' Education – Benefits, Challenges and Strategies?". The top line suggests how much we know about benefits. The middle one reflects our understanding of the obstacles. And the bottom line reveals how little we know about the most important aspect: what we should do to address the obstacles and gain the benefits, particularly in Africa, where the biggest challenges lie.

So while the diagram is hypothetical, the conclusion, is real' – we have a lot of compelling evidence about benefits and obstacles, but not nearly enough about what really works in various contexts and why, so that we can reach more girls effectively.

Why educate girls? Girls' education increases economic growth; reduces child mortality and malnutrition; brings improved health to women and those they care for; delays the age of first marriage; lowers fertility rates; increases women's domestic leverage; improves functioning in the wage labour force; and enhances family economic strategies.

There are broader outcomes, as well: if developing countries improve their economies but maintain current rates of population growth, the consequences for

increased environmental degradation will be enormous. Since women usually manage food, water, fuel, intensive agriculture and birth spacing, a woman with at least six years of education (the minimum to maintain literacy) will be a critical actor in population control, farm productivity, livelihood diversity, resource conservation and use of effective technologies. Indeed, the World Bank has concluded that improving female participation in education leads to one of the highest returns in environmental protection. Another beneficiary is good governance: girls' education leads to greater political participation of women, and recent research shows that governments are less corrupt when women are more active in politics or the labour force. For example, controlling for other factors, corruption falls as the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women increases; as does the quality of various social protections².

Even when various studies define these effects differently, findings on the measurable benefits of girls' education hold true³. The causes are clear. For example, improving girls' education is the cause of economic growth, not the result. Also, each of the effects mentioned here could be achieved in other ways, but only girls' education achieves them all⁴. In fact, evidence of the development benefits of female education is "so persuasive" according to an earlier World Bank study, that "new, econometric studies of the impacts ... on development are probably worthwhile only in extraordinary circumstances"⁵.

In 2000, 189 countries adopted eight Millennium Development Goals, including these:

- "Achieve universal primary education: ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of ordinary schooling."

- "Promote gender equality and empower women: eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015."

If the MDGs for education were met, the number of births per woman would be reduced by 0.6. Child mortality would also be reduced: not only does one more year of female education have the impact of reducing child mortality by 18.1 per thousand, but increasing the ratio of female to male educational attainment by 10% would reduce the under-five mortality

rate by 14.2 per thousand. If the goals were met, this translates into saving the lives of 35,000 children a year in Mali alone⁶.

Yet today 60% of the children not in primary school are girls. Will the goals be met? At the current rate of progress, all the international agencies agree the answer is no. In terms of reaching universal primary completion by 2015, for example, which by definition includes completion by girls, 70% of the seventy-three low-income countries for which data are available are "off track" or "seriously off track" according to World Bank analysis. Within sub-Saharan Africa, the figure is closer to 85%. In fact, if the current rates of progress for completion are anything to go by, universal primary completion cannot be reached until well beyond 2050⁷. Part of the reason is girls: they and other disadvantaged children will be the last to be included and the hardest to reach.

Recently, researchers have looked at the effects of girls' education from yet another angle, asking what happens if countries do not improve girls' participation in education. The stark statement that "gender inequality in education is bad for economic growth"⁸ highlights the issue. Research shows that the national economic and social costs of not educating girls and not achieving gender parity in education are high; and higher, in fact, for Africa than for any other region. Some of the negative consequences will be evident by 2005, and will increase thereafter. In addition four of the other MDGs – improvements in child mortality, maternal health, reduction of disease including HIV/Aids, and environmental stability will not be met or will be severely hindered without progress in girls' education.

Fortunately, the other side of the coin is that countries that are "seriously off track" in terms of reaching universal primary education, or have declining gender parities have most to benefit, in terms of economic growth, by getting their girls in school and expanding girls' education faster, particularly at primary level where investment will bring higher rates of return⁹.

The evidence is persuasive; the obstacles, not outlined here, are well known, so what is the problem? It is not simply money or lack of commitment. We just have very little good information on what actually works to get girls into school and educate them. In fact when Kane and Yoder¹⁰ looked at more than 2,500 studies relating to girls' education, only 250

dealt with strategies, and of these, only 32 contained enough information to draw conclusions of any kind. Nine years later, we are not much better off.

Resources are scarce and mistakes are going to be costly, so let us look at some of the things that work.

Girls and other disadvantaged groups are particularly vulnerable to the effects of generic problems of poverty, low GDP, HIV/Aids, poor education resource mobilisation and management, and poor quality of education. These cannot be compensated for by focusing only on the education sector and on girls. Improving employment and labour policies, out-of-home childcare, labour saving technologies, transport, and HIV/Aids communication and support programs are all critical.

Most successful approaches consist of a flexible package of interventions that respond to a constant analytical process of "thinking through" challenges and change. Projects that have used this approach to iterative design have produced dramatic rises in girls' enrolment and persistence

Some strategies are "gender-neutral", but have greater benefits for girls than boys: examples include expanding the supply of places, reducing distance, improving quality, lowering the age of enrolment, automatic promotion, open admissions, reducing costs, providing early childhood development programs, and making school scheduling flexible. Research shows that interventions that take special account of girls have often been shown to help boys, too.

Research shows that girls respond particularly well to improvements in quality, such as alternative programmes outside the formal school system; first language/local language instruction in the early years of schooling; local/female teachers, with positive relationships shown between the presence of female teachers and girls' participation at primary level; and single sex schools for improved achievement and for meeting cultural concerns.

Projects that reduce household costs of school attendance by abolishing fees, providing scholarships and stipends, assisting with transport costs and materials, and recognising opportunity costs have had well-documented positive impacts on access and retention in a range of countries. This may be one of the major

policy areas where benefits can be seen in the short term.

Distance affects both sexes, as research in much of Central and Western Africa shows, but various studies also show that household demand for girls' education is generally more sensitive to problems of distance than is boys'.

Most community "participation" is in fact financial. Real participation, ranging from identifying issues and potential approaches, to the rarest forms, e.g., participation in management, teacher supervision and curriculum development, has helped not only to create relevant local action but also to contribute to more responsive national planning.

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Facts and figures

- Above 80 percent of farmers in Africa are women¹.
- More than 40 percent of women in Africa do not have access to basic education¹.
- Educated mothers immunize their children 50 percent more often than mothers who are not educated¹.
- Aids spreads twice as quickly among uneducated girls than among girls that have even some schooling¹.
- The children of a woman with five years of primary school education have a survival rate 40 percent higher than children of women with no education¹.
- Women play a major role in food production in many parts of those areas, particularly in Africa. In Sudan, women make up 30% of the labor force in food production, 48% in Burkina-Faso and 80% in Congo².
- In many parts of the world, women do not have the same land ownership rights as men do. For example, fewer than 1 in 10 female farmers in India, Nepal, and Thailand own land².
- Women of all developing countries spend between 2 and 9 hours each day collecting fuel and fodder².
- Women hold less than 13 per cent of the world's parliamentary seats, and less than 9 percent of seats in the least developed countries³.

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A woman in Nyakomba, Zimbabwe, has cut a tree to have wood for making a fire in her kitchen to cook food for her family. There is no alternative source of energy so deforestation is the result. Each day the woman has to walk more far in order to find trees. 27 AUGUST 2001 – © Michel Szulc-Krzyzanowski / The Image Works

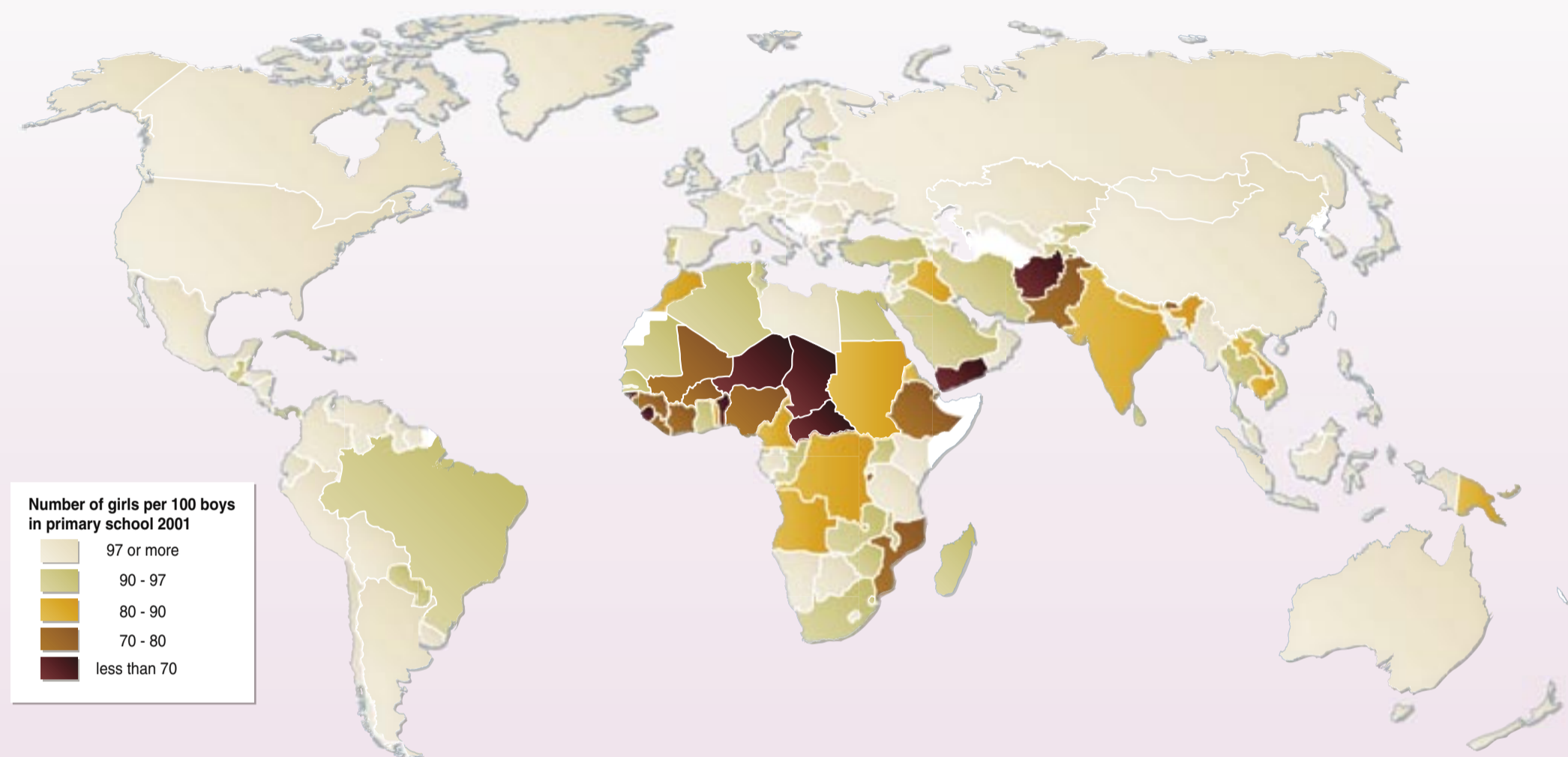
“Advancing gender equality, through reversing the various social and economic handicaps that make women voiceless and powerless, may also be one of the best ways of saving the environment ... The voice of women is critically important for the world’s future – not just for women’s future.”

Amartya Sen, 1998

“The women of Green Belt Movement have learnt about the causes and the symptoms of environmental degradation. They have begun to appreciate that they, rather than their government, ought to be custodians of the environment.”

Wangari Maathai, 1994

Gender equality and empowerment of women: Eliminate differences in education



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)

No hope without gender equality

By **Irene Dankelman**, Coordinator of the Sustainable Development Programme of the University of Nijmegen, and Senior Advisor Sustainable Development of Women’s Environment and Development Organisation in New York, USA

The daily lives of millions of women and men clearly demonstrate that gender equality, environmental sustainability and poverty eradication are closely linked. This has major implications for policies and actions. Gender is a determining factor in poverty-environment linkages. Gender inequalities, environmental deterioration and deepening poverty are mutually self-reinforcing. Conversely, improvements in any one of these areas can leverage improvements in the other two, thus enhancing livelihoods, protecting health, and reducing vulnerability.

Since the dawn of history, women have contributed essentially to the conservation, use and management of natural resources. Around the world they play distinct roles from men: managing land and biodiversity, collecting water, fuel and fodder, as well as other natural resources. In so doing they contribute time, energy and skills, not to mention their personal vision, to family and community development. Their extensive experiences make them an invaluable source of knowledge and expertise on environmental management.

Indigenous women draw on a complex knowledge base. They are familiar with ecosystems, geographic features, climate, weather, and tides. They understand the ecological succession, habitats and life

cycles of resource species. They have detailed knowledge of all kinds of plants and animals, their habitat requirements, means of reproduction, nutritive values, as well as knowledge of various types of tinder and fuel, foods, and medicinal herbs. They have also acquired all manner of survival skills, as well as general first aid, midwifery and childcare. Theirs too is cultural knowledge and understanding – including important plants and animals – rules relating to resources use, sharing and acquiring knowledge in culturally appropriate ways².

As Ruth Lilongula from the Solomon Islands said: “Biodiversity is the very core of our existence within our communities. You cannot say how many dollars this is worth because it is our culture and our survival. In this context biodiversity is invaluable ... We value our surroundings as our identity, as who we are, and our inheritance that is given to us ... Our environment is many things, a classroom, a pharmacy and a supermarket”³.

On the other hand, when the environment is degraded women and girls suffer first. A study in the Sindhuli district of Nepal, undertaken in 1993-94 by ActionAid, clearly demonstrates this point. Environmental degradation has compounded economic stress within households and on scarce resources. This means that pressure, not only on women, but also on children, to do more work and at an earlier age is increasing. Girls do the hardest work, have the least to say and the fewest education options. “My parents want to make their son a BA [graduate]. But order me to get fodder and

fuelwood every day” (girls song, Nepal). To promote girls’ school enrolment in fragile ecosystems, environmental quality is a precondition⁴.

Similar linkages are apparent in access to safe drinking water and gender equality. Women are the main collectors and users of water for household uses worldwide. The availability of clean water consequently reduces water collection burdens, in particular the care burden for mothers. The incidence of water-borne diseases is reduced. Commonly entitlement to water is linked to land, but land tenure laws and legal systems show major gender disparities in ownership and rights, distorting women’s access to environmental assets in many parts of the world. There is also an increased incidence of physical and sexual assault when women have to walk long distances to remote areas for water and sanitation, particularly in situations of conflict and war. Access to water and sanitation closer to home, would limit women’s vulnerability.

Global environmental change jeopardises environmentally based livelihood strategies. Climate change is predicted to accentuate the gaps between the world’s rich and poor, as people living in poverty are more vulnerable. The effects of climate change are very likely to effect poor people disproportionately and to be gender-differentiated. Perspectives, responses and impacts surrounding disaster events vary for men and women. They have different sets of responsibilities, vulnerabilities, unequal capabilities and opportunities for adjustment. Women and men experience environmental change differently. The

effects of the tsunami of 26 December 2004 showed that clearly.

However, as in many other environmental and sustainable development negotiations and agreements, gender aspects are also still poorly represented in the climate change negotiations.

Women have organised themselves to protect the environment and promote environmental justice: in their communities, in national organisations, in international networks, working on issues such as biodiversity, land rights, access to water and sanitation, sustainable energy and climate change. All over the world they are major agents for environmental action, prompting others to work on the basis of the linkages of environmental sustainability, gender equality and poverty reduction.

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Goal 3



Goal 2