

## GOAL 2

# THE 'EDUCATION GOAL'

## Goal 2 Achieve universal primary education

**Target 3 Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling**

*Indicators Net enrolment ratio in primary education*

*Proportion of pupils starting Grade 1 who reach Grade 5*

*Literacy rate of 15-24 year olds*

## Education is the key to building women's capabilities

Education is a key strategy for gender equality and women's empowerment. Primary education is the first step towards acquiring the basic tools of learning, and can open the doors to a much wider world of knowledge and information that would otherwise be inaccessible to women. Education can expand opportunities for women, equip them to make more informed choices and empower them to resist oppression. Education can increase women's chances of getting better paid and more rewarding employment and can enable them to claim their rights. The right to education is inextricably linked to other basic human rights including the right to freedom from discrimination, the right to work and the right to participate in decisions affecting one's self and one's community.

Yet, millions of women around the world are living with the consequences of not having completed five years of schooling or not having been to school at all. What is worse, the processes that kept adult women out of school in their childhood, still operate to deny millions of girls their right to education.

## Multiple factors deny girls' their right to education

- **Patriarchal attitudes** that define girls' destiny in terms of marriage and family, so that parents see little value in educating girls. Even if they are sent to school for some years, early marriage and pregnancy force girls to drop out before completion.
- **Girls' contribution to the family economy in terms of unpaid work**, both inside and outside the house, is another reason for parents to keep them at home or pull them out of school in times of economic stress. Even if they do go to school, girls have to make up their quota of work before and after school, and are often too exhausted to learn.

- **Distance and physical infrastructure.** Concerns about safety and 'honour' make parents reluctant to send girls to schools that are far from the home or outside the village, particularly in situations of conflict. Similarly, the lack of security in school buildings and the absence of amenities such as separate toilets can be barriers to schooling for girls.

*Gender parity in access to schooling is the first step toward gender equality in education. However, the world is still far from achieving gender parity in enrolment and completion rates, particularly in secondary school.*

*Worldwide, it is estimated that 54–57 percent of all out-of-school children are girls.<sup>7</sup> In South Asia girls constitute two-thirds of all out of school children (UNESCO 2004).*

*From Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women  
Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, UN Millennium Project 2005*

- **The school environment.** Going to school can expose girls to sexual harassment and abuse from teachers and students. In such situations, the presence of women teachers can help in convincing parents that schools are safe places for girls.

- **The content and process of education.** Curricula are often dull and irrelevant to real life. Textbooks can reinforce gender stereotypes by casting women in subordinate roles.

*In a UNICEF study in Cameroon (2002), as many as 27 per cent of girl students reported having had sex with a teacher.*

*From Toward Universal Primary Education  
Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, UN Millennium Project 2005*

Teaching methods and classroom transactions have gender biases, with boys getting more attention and affirmation from teachers than girls.

- **Poverty and the rising cost of schooling is a major factor.** Cuts in the education budget in many countries have resulted in increases in school fees and the levying of 'informal' user charges such as school maintenance fees. Discontinuance of incentives such as free textbooks and school meals adds to the costs of schooling. In such situations, poor families often decide to use their scarce resources to send their sons to school while keeping girls at home to contribute to the family economy.
- **HIV/AIDS** has become a major barrier to girls' participation in education. In countries affected by the pandemic, girls often become the major bread-earners and care-takers of families where most adults are either ill or dead. In such circumstances, they have no option but to drop out of school.

Some countries show a **reverse gender gap** in education – a situation where fewer boys than girls are in school. The reasons could include a 'macho' culture where boys are on the streets from an early age, families putting boys to work because they can earn higher wages than girls, the perception of education as irrelevant to men's 'real' life and work, and the involvement of boys in crime. Affirmative action (such as special scholarships and incentives to encourage girls to go to school) has also been identified as a possible factor in creating a reverse gender gap. Although seen only in a few countries, the reverse gender gap is a serious gender issue and needs to be addressed through focused strategies directed towards motivating boys to enrol in school.

## Putting primary education under a 'gender lens' can add value to MDGRs

The factors that keep girls from enrolling in school, or push them out before they have completed the full course of primary education are well-known, as are the strategies that can be put in place to address them. Yet, a significant number of countries are still far from meeting the goal of universal primary education, mainly because large numbers of girls are out of school. Increasing girls' enrolment is therefore central to meeting Goal 2 in most countries.

### Girls' education is instrumental in achievement of MDGs

- Women who have some education have access to diversified opportunities for employment and command a higher wage, thus reducing poverty and contributing to national economic growth.
- Education can help women get information on protecting themselves from HIV/AIDS, and can even increase their ability to negotiate safe sex.
- Women with six or more years of education are more likely to seek prenatal care, assisted childbirth and postnatal care, and are more likely to immunise their children than mothers with no schooling.
- Most farmers in the world are women. Education for women can give women access to knowledge and technologies to increase agricultural productivity.

Moreover, because it is the primary agent in enhancing women's capabilities, education for girls is integrally linked to achievement of other MDGs.

Highlighting the issue of gender disparities in primary education in the national MDGR can spur a change from 'business as usual' to significant shifts in approaches to education for communities and citizens, as well as for policy-makers and donors.

Simply presenting disaggregated data on enrolment can highlight the gender gap and provide a policy rationale for increased investments in girls' education. In a context where several countries are experiencing cuts in the education budget as part of macro-economic policy adjustments, it is important to emphasise

*... everything else being equal, countries in which the ratio of girls' to boys' enrolment in primary or secondary education is less than 0.75 can expect levels of GNP that are roughly 25 percent lower than countries in which there is less gender disparity in enrolments.*

*... countries that fail to meet the goal of gender parity in education will face considerable costs,*

*both in forgone economic growth and in reductions in fertility, child mortality and malnutrition. And without appropriate action, these costs will increase over time.*

*From Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women  
Task Force on Education and Gender Equality. UN Millennium Project 2005*

the need to step up investments in education and underline the instrumental value of access to education as a long-term strategy for poverty reduction.

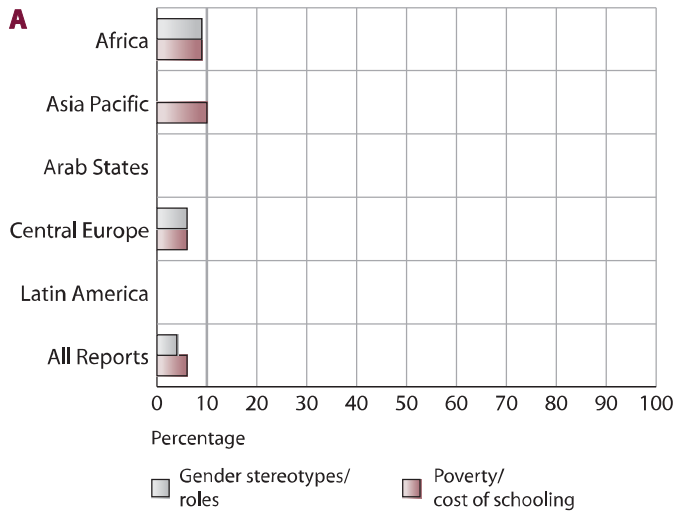
In addition, by identifying the barriers to universalisation, the MDGR can make a case for focused interventions to enhance access for girls from specially disadvantaged groups.

## How gendered is reporting on Goal 2?

Less than half of the reports reviewed (33 out of 78 reports) present disaggregated data on primary education under Goal 2.

Thirteen reports state that gender parity has been achieved while four countries (Bhutan, Brazil, Lebanon and the Slovak Republic) mention a reverse gender gap.

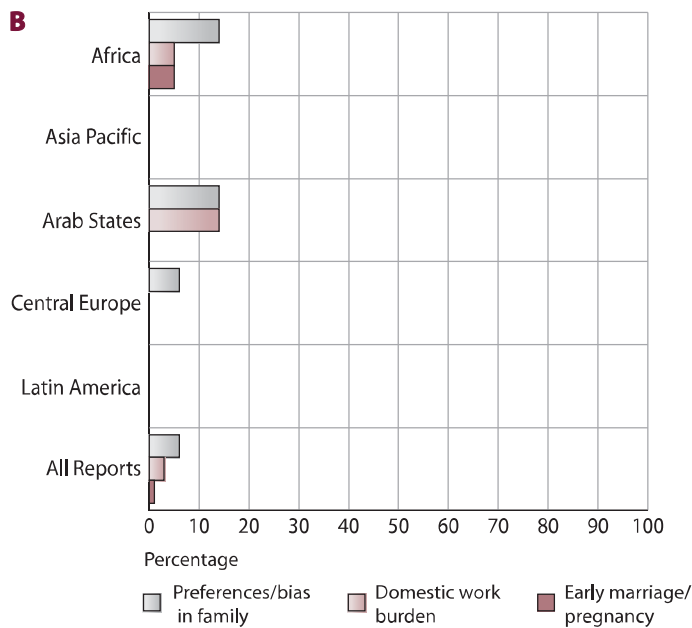
**Figure 4 Gender gap in primary education - 'demand-side' factors**



**Girls less likely to stay in school**

*In all developing regions, except Latin America and the Caribbean and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, girls are less likely than boys to remain at school. The gap between girls and boys is greatest in the 22 countries where fewer than 60 per cent of children complete their primary education.*

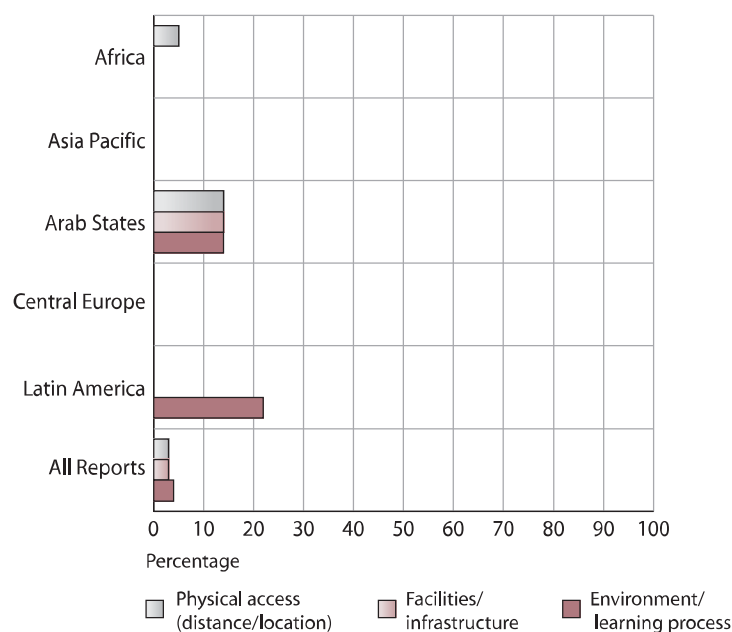
*From The Millennium Development Goals Report  
United Nations, 2005*



**Gender gaps in education - naming the causes**

- **Gender biases in family** (Chad, Guinea, Sao Tome, Tajikistan, Yemen)
- **Poverty and high cost of schooling** (Albania, Ghana, Gambia, Mauritius, Tajikistan)
- **Stereotypes about women's roles** (Guinea, Sao Tome, Tajikistan)
- **Burden of domestic work** (Ghana, Yemen)
- **Location of school** (Gambia, Yemen)
- **Conditions in schools** (Egypt, Yemen)
- **Classroom environment** (El Salvador, Paraguay)
- **Early marriage and pregnancy** (Sao Tome)
- **Economic restructuring and resource cuts** (Albania)

Figure 5 **Gender gap in primary education - 'supply-side' factors**



### Costing Goal 2

*The World Bank estimates that achieving gender equality in primary education through universal enrolment would require an increase in public spending of around 3 per cent per year in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and 30 per cent per year in sub-Saharan Africa.*

*Achieving universal primary education for girls only would need an increase in spending of only 2 per cent in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and 20 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa.*

*From Engendering Development through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources and Voice  
The World Bank, 2001*

**Only 23 reports (less than one third of the total) identify the factors underlying the gender gap in primary education. It is noteworthy that all the reports that do so, also include an explicit commitment to reducing the gender gap in education.**

Only five of the reviewed reports (Albania, Ghana, Gambia, Mauritius and Tajikistan) make the connections between girls' education and poverty. While a few reports make mention of the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on the education sector, none of them make any specific reference to HIV/AIDS as a barrier to girls' schooling in the discussion on Goal 2.

In as many as 21 reports, the issues of girls' education and the barriers to access have been extensively discussed under Goal 3. However, only one report (Honduras) has a cross-reference to Goal 3.

While this is certainly a function of the overlap in the targets and indicators for Goals 2 and 3, it need not have been a limitation – countries could well have chosen to present disaggregated data on primary education under Goal 2 and on secondary and tertiary education under Goal 3. **That comparatively few countries have chosen to do so is an indication of the limitations of 'reporting by the book' – even if more data is available, most countries choose to report only against the minimum set of suggested indicators.**

### How can reporting on Goal 2 be strengthened?

- Making it mandatory to provide **sex disaggregated data** on the standard minimum set of indicators.
- Drawing on **EFA commitments and goals** to highlight links with Goal 2 and underline issues such as content and quality of education.

- **Mapping the national education database** and listing the indicators for which sex disaggregated data is available for inclusion in the MDGR. Several countries now routinely collect disaggregated data on enrolment, drop-out and completion rates. Many have carried out gender reviews of textbooks and classroom transactions, the findings of which can be highlighted.
- Countries where universal primary education has already been achieved or is close to being achieved could consider **reporting on school enrolment for a wider age range**, for instance the 5-14 year age group.
- Identifying and **listing the main obstacles** to girls' education in the specific country context, and prioritising data collection on these issues. Data available from micro studies can be creatively used.
- **Localising and contextualising** indicators and providing data collected at the sub-national level on the situation of especially marginalised groups of girls (for instance, girls in families affected by HIV/AIDS, girls in remote rural communities, girls from migrant communities, street children, girls who have been married at an early age and so on).
- **Cross-referencing** between data provided under Goals 2 and 3 to underline the connections between education and well-being.
- Reporting on the results of **costing exercises** and targeted budget allocations for programmes to address barriers to universal primary education.