Findings reports on ongoing operational, economic and sector work carried out by the World Bank and its member governments in the Africa Region. It is published periodically by the Africa Technical Department on behalf of the Region.

Girls and Schools in Sub-Saharan Africa: From Analysis to Action

Significant gains have been made by African governments over the past thirty years in increasing access to education. However, greater challenges lie ahead if the goal of Education for All is to be achieved. Fiscal crises, civil strife, political instability, drought, endemic poverty and persistently high demographic pressures on education systems have resulted in stagnating enrollments and declining quality. Other pressing educational concerns include poor student participation, high drop-out and repetition rates, low academic achievement, and low teacher morale and attendance. Perhaps the most daunting challenge of all is that of promoting female education.

The cross-cultural study of women's educational outcomes has increased tremendously since the 1970s. Analyses have revealed particularly wide gender gaps in enrollments in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The central problems of female education have been clearly identified as access to school, attainment in years of schooling, academic achievement and accomplishment after school. All of these problems are interrelated and influenced by in- and out-of-school factors.

This research has developed a compelling case for the inter-generational economic and social benefits of female education. The evidence of significant returns to female education includes reduced fertility, reduced infant and maternal mortality, enhanced family health and welfare, improved children's education, and increased agricultural productivity, earnings, and overall economic productivity for women and the larger economy.

Despite this growing body of knowledge, however, few significant programs and projects have been implemented to reduce the gender gap in education, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, and those implemented have had limited impact.

The study Girls and Schools in Sub-Saharan Africa: From Analysis to Action presents what is known about the problems of female education in Sub-Saharan Africa, and outlines a process for bringing an operational gender perspective to the region's educational planning, programming, management, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The study:

- summarizes the state of knowledge on the socioeconomic, sociocultural, school, political and institutional factors that influence female participation in education in Sub-Saharan Africa;
- offers an overview of some of the promising strategies, programs and projects being tried to promote girls' participation; and
- provides an outline of an approach describing how this knowledge may be used to design interventions targeted at reducing the gender gap in education.

Factors Affecting Female Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa

The socio-cultural and socio-economic factors that constrain girls' education at the household and community level are closely interwoven. They include the direct and opportunity costs of schooling, which may be prohibitive to some families, and the priority given to girls' future roles as mothers and wives, which may have a strong negative bearing on their formal educational opportunities. The effects of these factors on girls' education are far-reaching, and affect the performance and persistence of those girls who remain in school. An understanding of how these factors govern household decisions leading to low investment in and ambivalence towards female education is the key to formulating...
strategies to address the low societal demand for female education.

The recent scholarship on **school factors** affecting girls' education provides a good indication of the many ways in which schools limit girls' academic potential. Through exclusion, avoidance and marginalization, schools reflect and promote society's low expectations of girls. Studies focus on how school environments affect girls' access to schools, their learning achievement, and level of attainment. Teachers hold negative attitudes about the academic potential of female students and project the wider communities' gender biases into classrooms. School cultures are generally hostile to girls, and sexual harassment and violence within educational institutions create an uncomfortable milieu for learning. The negative images of women in textbooks and other learning materials further reinforce society's view of women. This situation is exacerbated by the poor conditions in schools and low teacher morale.

Many **political and institutional factors** also constrain female participation in education. Affecting the enrollment of both boys and girls are the fiscal crises and the inadequate public support to the education sector that results, particularly at the primary level. Further, the research and policy dialogues on girls' education in Africa remain marginal to the broader debates on how to address the crises in educational systems in the region, even though the strategies for addressing the region's general education problems can be used to promote faster improvements for girls. The lack of political will in promoting the education of girls, unclear strategies, and weak capacity in research and data collection also act as constraints to female schooling.

**Promising Interventions to Promote Female Education**

The review of the literature demonstrates the variation, complexity and inter-relatedness of the factors that constrain female education in Africa. These factors are similar to yet different from those exhibited elsewhere in the developing world. There is a growing body of scholarly review of strategies to enhance female education and their efficacy. On the supply side, these practices include building more schools, improving the school environment, training more female teachers, and removing gender bias in textbooks. On the demand side, they include launching information campaigns to promote the benefits of female education and providing stipends and scholarships as incentives to parents. The following table presents a summary of some of these promising strategies.

The study draws several conclusions from this detailed catalogue of policy and program approaches:

- First, it is difficult to assess the cost-effectiveness of most of the initiatives.
- Second, since girls' education is constrained by several related factors at the home, school, community and government levels, the most promising approaches appear to be those which address supply and demand-side factors simultaneously.
- Third, most of the successful initiatives have been conceived and managed by non-governmental organizations on a relatively small scale with little direct government involvement but with strong community engagement.
- Fourth, the success of many of the initiatives must be treated cautiously as their effectiveness has yet to be proven.
- Fifth, despite this growing body of knowledge about the complex problems of female education, few significant programs and projects have been implemented to reduce the gender gap in education, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, and those implemented have had limited impact.

**An Approach to Identifying and Planning Effective Interventions**

The gap between how much is known about the issues affecting girls' education and how little is being done about these issues must be closed. This study proposes three phases that governments can use in moving from analysis to action.

- First, the priority problem in a given system or locale must be identified. A set of eighteen statistical indicators, which follows the status of girls as they progress through the education system, provides a useful stimulus for selecting and defining this problem. These are detailed in a related study titled *Statistical Indicators of Female Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa*. All stakeholders -- parents, teachers, older students, educational administrators and community leaders -- will easily comprehend these summaries of information, thus making broad participation possible before action is taken.
- Then, the principal controllable causes of this problem need to be diagnosed. The study *Questions for the Analysis of Female Participation in Education in Sub-Saharan Africa* provides an analytic framework to help understand the household, school, community and national level factors that influence female participation in education. By assessing how much each factor contributes to the key problem, it should be possible to identify which factors probably need to be dealt with if an intervention is to be successful.
- Finally, alternative mixes of possible interventions can be developed, assessed and planned in detail to form an intervention program. The report suggests practical ways to develop this program.
A Summary of Promising Interventions to Promote Female Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEMAND-SIDE FACTORS</th>
<th>POSSIBLE INTERVENTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Household and community factors**  
High direct costs of schooling | • Lower the cost of school materials.  
• Provide transportation and uniforms.  
• Introduce bursary, scholarship and fee waiver programs, school lunches, medical and health support such as deworming. |
| High opportunity costs of schooling | • Adjust the school calendar to accommodate household child labour requirements.  
• Reduce the distance between school and home.  
• Use satellite schools.  
• Provide child care and pre-school facilities Promote labour-saving technologies. |
| Low private economic returns to girls education | • Improve the legal and regulatory systems to enhance women's status.  
• Make education curricula more responsive and relevant to livelihood and market demand. |
| Chastity and sexual safety | • Increase community participation in schools.  
• Construct culturally appropriate facilities.  
• Promote more female teachers.  
• Secularize Koranic schools. |
| Low demand for female education | • Launch information campaigns that engage community, religious and civic leaders.  
• Promote adult literacy programs. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUPPLY-SIDE FACTORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **School level factors**  
Enrollment and promotion policy  
Management: calendar and safety  
Curricula  
Materials  
Methods | • Increase enrollments by lowering the enrollment age.  
• Reduce drop-out rates; review repetition and expulsion policies.  
• Provide child care facilities.  
• Institute flexible hours.  
• Improve achievement: review learning materials for gender bias, improve science and math teaching.  
• Promote female teachers in the sciences.  
• Establish science laboratories and school libraries.  
• Institute tutoring and mentoring programs.  
• Promote gender sensitivity training in all pre and in-service training courses and for educational managers. |

| **Political and institutional factors**  
Policy on schoolgirl pregnancy, promotion of female educators, training of staff  
Attitude, will and commitment to empowering women and the poor  
Legal status of women | • Create a favorable environment to support women and the poor through policy review.  
• Invest in the necessary structures; schools, facilities for girls, toilets, dormitories, walls.  
• Launch information campaigns.  
• Enhance the status of women through the regulatory process.  
• Adopt poverty-alleviating strategies that release women and girls from the tasks of water and fuel collection for more productive activities.  
• Improve women’s access to the formal labour market. |