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# Executive Summary

Countries around the world have achieved huge gains in primary education, reaching a world average of 83.8 percent in net primary enrollment. However, large numbers of students still do not complete primary education, and even fewer continue on to secondary school.

Since so few children complete primary school, those who do must be able to continue their schooling. It is the only way for students and society to reap the full benefits of their initial investment in a literate, educated population. Currently, 83.8 percent of children worldwide attend primary school, but the rate drops to 59.3 percent for secondary school. In sub-Saharan Africa, only 17 percent of the girls are enrolled in secondary school. A renewed push to ensure that girls worldwide have access to secondary, as well as primary education is necessary now if the investments made are to pay off.

## Barriers and Challenges: Why fewer girls?

- Girls suffer more from the effects of poverty because it costs more to educate a girl than a boy — it is the cost of tuition plus the “opportunity cost” or the cost to the family of the loss of her labor within the household, in the field, and at the market place. The “opportunity cost” for boys is not as high.
- The actual number of schools drops drastically at the secondary level, thereby increasing travel time for both boys and girls. Economic and safety concerns make parents reluctant to send their girls to boarding schools or to let them walk long distances to day schools. Inadequate school infrastructure, such as lack of latrines, also contributes to girls dropping out.
- Many families that cannot afford to educate all their children only allow the best-performing children to continue. If girls are tired from chores or walking, they struggle to perform well.

- Girls face inequities in the classroom and often lack female teachers as role models.
- Corruption in the classroom may include, in addition to extracting unnecessary fees and expenses from parents, pulling girls from class to assist with cooking for school functions, getting breakfast or lunch for teachers, running errands, cleaning the school yard, etc.

### **Keeping the Promise: The five main benefits of girls' secondary education**

1. A commitment to educating girls at the secondary level will pressure communities and countries to build more secondary schools for girls — Existence of secondary schools increases primary enrollment and quality. Ensuring that all students are within a reasonable distance of a middle school that is affordable will increase parental commitment to schooling. Their involvement leads to higher quality education.
2. Girls' secondary education results in social benefits to the whole society — Secondary education equips students with critical thinking enabling civic participation and democratic change. As students pursue their education, they are less likely to engage in or become a victim of crime and youth violence. In addition, secondary education reduces the risk of human trafficking by increasing economic opportunities and making children less vulnerable.
3. Girls are a valuable health resource — Perhaps the most important benefits are found in the health field where girls and women are uniquely positioned to address some of the most significant health challenges facing developing countries. Girls' secondary education reduces infant mortality, increases childhood immunization and nutrition, reduces children's stunting, and lowers fertility rates and unwanted pregnancies.
4. Girls' secondary education can mitigate HIV and AIDS — Half of the over 40 million people living with HIV and AIDS are women and girls. Secondary school offers a valuable opportunity to catch girls when they are most vulnerable, when they can and must learn healthy behaviors. In Zambia, for example, AIDS spreads twice as fast among uneducated girls .



5. Girls' secondary education is a tool for poverty alleviation — Primary and secondary education produce high returns in terms of wage growth. Increasing the share of women with secondary education by 1 percentage point can boost the annual per capita income growth by 0.3 percent on average, according to a 100-country study by the World Bank.

### Strategies for promoting girls' secondary education

- Increasing access and retention— Building more schools will reduce travel and costs and improve girls' safety. Clean, separate toilets for female students and teachers increases retention. Providing a safe environment, including reporting procedures for students and teachers, reduces sexual harassment.
- Improving equity/relevance/quality — Once girls gain access to secondary school education, they often become discouraged or drop out not only for financial reasons, but also out of frustration with a school environment where gender inequities prevail, classes are not participatory, teachers and teaching examples are biased towards males, and the curriculum is not relevant to their lives. Teachers must be trained in student-centered practices. Schools also

should seize the opportunity for HIV and AIDS prevention education and teach responsible behavior and life skills.

- Enhancing motivation and payoff — To truly value their education, students, especially girls, need to see that it will lead to a job and an income. Additional training and strong female role models can help.

Adopting the recommendations in this report—to increase access and improve retention/survival and completion rates, improve the quality by making secondary classes more relevant and more gender equitable, and increase expectations for girls' independence and success—will result in an environment that empowers girls, benefiting themselves and the world.