

New York, 8 May 2011 – Making sure girls and women have equal access to quality education is key to sustainable economic development, UNICEF said today, as the world celebrates Global Action Week on Education.

This year's Global Action Week focuses on Education for Women and Girls, as 53 per cent of all children out of school remain girls denied of the right to learn. Poverty, exploitation and armed conflict magnify the risk girls face even as they go to school, forcing many to stay home or drop out in fear of their safety. In countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, sexual violence and mass rape - a clear violation of their rights - continues to terrify and severely harm women and girls, ultimately denying them access to education.

"If the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved by the 2015 deadline, we must step up efforts to ensure that more girls and women have the opportunity to learn," says Susan Durston, UNICEF's Associate Director of Education. "We have ample evidence that investing in girls' education yields high returns."

Girls with access to education not only vastly improve their own lives but also bring change to their families, economies, and societies. Providing girls and women with a quality education is a highly effective tool to address poverty and fight disease.

A woman is more likely to get a job and earn a higher wage if she has a basic education: one percentage point increase in female education raises the average level of GDP by 0.37 percentage points. Every additional year of primary school boosts girls' eventual wages by 10 - 20 per cent, and an extra year of secondary school by 15 - 25 per cent.

Access to education has increased over the last two decades. Today, more children, and girls in particular are in school than ever before. The number of out-of-school children has decreased from 115 million to 67 million between 1999 and 2008, with notable increases in enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Countries such as Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Mozambique, Nepal, Tanzania and Yemen have combined rapid increases in enrolment with improved gender equality. As a result, between

1999 and 2008 the gender gap in the out-of-school population narrowed from 57 per cent to 53 per cent globally.

UNICEF and its partners are working to overcome barriers preventing access to education through Back to School campaigns, school fee abolition, child-friendly schools, and early childhood education. The Back on Track programme works to bring educational opportunities during and after crises, including by establishing child-friendly spaces, which create an environment where children are protected from sexual exploitation and other kinds of abuse.

“Getting girls into school demands concerted action and political leadership. In addition, the rights and needs of girls also have to be addressed to ensure that they stay in school and receive a quality education,” Durston said. “Bolder steps must be taken on all fronts to ensure the successful transition from primary to secondary education and to make sure that girls can complete a full course of learning.”

Source: [UNICEF](#)