



A Recommendation for Poverty Alleviation

Adolescent Girls, the UN Millennium Development Goals and the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Prioritize Girls to Change the World

Global leaders and development decision makers have yet to leverage the best asset we have to counter the causes of extreme poverty and its devastating consequences: adolescent girls.

Evidence collected in the past two decades makes clear that when an adolescent girl's basic needs and social inclusion are denied, she is a source of and susceptible to a range of the most urgent and disempowering global development concerns, including maternal and infant mortality, early and forced marriage, HIV infection, violence and extreme poverty.

However, meaningful investment in adolescent girls – acknowledging and prioritizing their needs and their unique potential to break the cycle of entrenched poverty and unleash social good – can optimize all global development efforts. Healthy, educated, empowered girls can stop poverty before it has an opportunity to persist.

Thus, the key to addressing the most pressing global development challenges is to invest in the power and potential of the 515 million adolescent girls in developing countries. **This is a recommendation for why and how to utilize the most promising strategy for poverty alleviation that exists.**

Why Adolescent Girls?

*Of the one billion people who live in extreme poverty, an estimated 70 percent are girls and women.*¹

Perhaps the most neglected and vulnerable among the global population of the extremely poor are girls in their early adolescence, age 10 to 14, for whom the onset of physical and emotional changes and their evolving role in communities can be accompanied by enormous economic and social benefits – or irreversible consequences.

It is at this moment that she may become ...

- One of the 83 percent of girls in Sub-Saharan Africa not enrolled in secondary schools.²
- One in three girls in developing countries married by age 18 or one in nine married before her 15th birthday.³
- One of the estimated 150 million girls under age 18 who have experienced rape or other forms of sexual violence.⁴
- Lost to the leading cause of death for adolescent girls, pregnancy and childbirth complications, from which she is five times more likely to die than a woman in her twenties.⁵
- Among the 63 percent of young people aged 15-24 living with HIV. Young women have infection rates that are twice as high as men of the same age.⁶
- Among the 58 percent of all unpaid workers or eventually one of the estimated two billion working-age adults who are neither working in jobs nor looking for work, the majority of whom are women.^{7,8}

Or, the same girl **could** become the potent agent that unlocks intergenerational poverty and inequity. Compelling evidence suggests that dedicating girl-specific resources in education, general and reproductive health services and financial literacy leads to better educated, safer, healthier and economically powerful adolescent girls who become engines for positive, intertwined benefits for themselves, their families, communities and countries.

- *Global and Local Economics*
 - If young Nigerian women had the same employment rate as young men, the country would add \$13.9 billion to the GDP annually.⁹ Approximately \$3.4 billion could be added to Kenya's gross income each year if all 1.6 million adolescent girls in Kenya completed secondary school and its 220,098 adolescent mothers were employed instead of pregnant so early in their lives.¹⁰
 - Closing the joblessness gap between girls and boys would yield an increase in GDP of up to 1.2 percent in one year.¹¹
 - One extra year of secondary education increases a girls' eventual income by 10 to 20 percent.¹²
 - Investing in girls ignites a future multiplier effect. The World Bank reports that young women are likely to reinvest up to 90 percent of their income in their families and communities.
- *Education and Health*
 - A girl with seven years of education marries four years later and has 2.2 fewer children.¹³
 - A child is 40 percent more likely to live past the age of five if its mother has a basic education.¹⁴
 - Educated mothers immunize their children 50 percent more often than mothers who are not educated.¹⁵

- Literacy and secondary school attendance has been proven to protect girls from HIV infection.¹⁶
- *Education, Empowerment, Participation and Equity*
 - Research often finds that educated women experience less violence.¹⁷
 - Educating girls also tends to promote democracy and their political participation.^{18, 19}
 - Educated girls are less likely to experience female genital mutilation or subject their daughters to it.²⁰

Why Now?

Gains for girls and women have been achieved, but the agenda remains undefined and unfinished, the potential for dramatic advances against global poverty unrealized.

The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) mobilized significant energy, political will and donor commitments for unified and essential development goals. The framework has harnessed global attention for the world's most serious issues and provided essential guidance for budget and policy decision-makers in developing countries.

However, there is much yet to accomplish. The 515 million adolescent girls in developing countries are part of the largest ever youth population. They are also among the most isolated, marginalized and invisible of any population, benefitting from as little as two cents of every aid dollar allocated.²¹ Neither an equity agenda, nor a beneficial demographic dividend, can be achieved without dramatically changing the experiences and expectations of this generation of adolescent girls.

The time is now. The opportunity is clear – a virtuous cycle or a trap of deprivation. **It is imperative that the next global development goals build on the current framework and explicitly prioritize adolescent girls** to advance effective and sustainable poverty alleviation efforts.

What Can Be Done

Make strategic and significant investments in programs focused on adolescent girls commensurate with their importance as contributors to the fulfillment of economic and social goals.

- **Do the Maths and Reap an Extraordinarily High Return on Investment: Educate Girls**
 - Ensure all adolescent girls benefit from compulsory, quality basic education through lower secondary school, which enables them to meet measurable learning standards and acquire relevant skills.
- **Marry Common Sense with Good Policy and Legal Enforcement: End Child Marriage**
 - Child marriage undermines nearly every current MDG and likely future development goals. It stems from a fundamental inequality between boys and girls, and stands in the way of girls attending school, avoiding maternal death and HIV, and achieving gender equality. It must end.
- **Put the “A” in MNCH: Defend Her Health and Delay Her First Pregnancy**
 - It is adolescent girls who are most likely to die from pregnancy and in childbirth. The best way to improve maternal health and decrease maternal and infant death is to ensure that adolescent girls get the reproductive health information and services, maternal health care and adequate nutrition they need at every stage of adolescence.
- **Girls = Global Growth: Equip and Employ Her**
 - The evidence is clear. Adolescent girls are perhaps the most promising future contributors to global economic growth. Fuel this engine for prosperity with her full economic participation and access to training and financial assets.

These broad targets should inform the development of meaningful global indicators for girls. Prioritize girls – ensure that their lives and their potential can flourish – to change the world.

¹ United Nations Development Programme. *Human Development Report 1995*. New York: United Nations, 1995. ² UNESCO. *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2003/4*. Paris: UNESCO. ³ (Excluding China) United Nations Population Fund. *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*. New York: UNFPA, 2012. ⁴ Pinheiro, P.S. *World Report on Violence Against Children: United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Children*. Geneva: UN, 2006. ⁵ United Nations Population Fund. *State of the World Population 2004*. New York: UNFPA, 2004. ⁶ UNAIDS. *The Global AIDS Epidemic – Key Facts*. New York: UNAIDS, July 2012. ^{7,8} The World Bank. *World Development Reports 2012 and 2013*. Washington DC: World Bank, 2012, 2013. ⁹ The World Bank. *Living Standard Survey, 1998-2008*. ¹⁰ Chaaban, J; Cunningham, W. *Measuring the Economic Gains of Investing in Girls: The Girl Effect Dividend*. Policy Research Working Paper. World Bank: Washington DC, August 2011. ¹¹ *ibid*. ¹² Psacharopoulos, G; Patrinos, H. *Returns to Investment in Education: A Further Update*. Policy Research Working Paper. World Bank: Washington, DC, 2002. ¹³ Levine, R; et. al. *Girls Count a Global Investment & Action Agenda: A Girls Count Report on Adolescent Girls*. Center for Global Development. *Girls Count*, 2009. ¹⁴ Summers, L. *Investing in All the People: Educating Women in Developing Countries*. EDI Seminar Paper No. 45. Washington, DC: World Bank, 1994. ¹⁵ Gage, A; et al. *Household Structure and Childhood Immunization in Niger and Nigeria*. *Demography* 34 (2): 195–309. ¹⁶ UNAIDS. *HIV/AIDS Epidemic Update 2003*. New York: UNAIDS, December 2003. ¹⁷ Heise, L; et. al. *Ending Violence against Women*. Population Information Program. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health, 1999. ¹⁸ Barro, Robert J. “Determinants of Democracy.” *Journal of Political Economy* 107 (6): S158–83, 1999. ¹⁹ Basu, A; et al. *Does Education Promote Growth and Democracy? Some Evidence from East Asia and Latin America*. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2001. ²⁰ World Health Organization. *Female Genital Mutilation*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 1998. ²¹ Chaaban, J; Cunningham, W. *Measuring the Economic Gains of Investing in Girls: The Girl Effect Dividend*. Policy Research Working Paper. World Bank: Washington DC, August 2011.