

Global AIDS Alliance



ADVOCACY BRIEF

**Accelerating Efforts to
Achieve Universal Basic Education:**

A Critical Component of the Global AIDS Response

May 6, 2005

“Education is freedom. It provides the tools to affect one’s own destiny.” —*Oprah Winfrey, November 29, 2004*

“I would like to meet the new President of Kenya. Because he abolished school fees for poor children and a million extra children showed up at school. I think that that’s something that’s likely to affect more lives positively than almost anything any other political leader will do this year.” —*Former President Bill Clinton on ABC’s “Primetime Live,” November 16, 2004*

“Without achieving gender equality for girls in education, the world has no chance of achieving many of the ambitious health, social and development targets it has set for itself.” —*United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, March 3, 2005*

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I. SUMMARY

In many of the countries hardest hit by the AIDS epidemic, young people ages 15 to 24 now account for 60% of new HIV infections. Almost two-thirds of these newly infected young people are girls, who are highly vulnerable to contracting HIV for a variety of social, cultural, economic, and physiological reasons. Many girls resort to sex with older men, known as “sugar daddies,” in order to earn money for themselves and their families to survive and to pay for school-related fees, thereby fostering and accelerating HIV transmission. And they are more likely to be taken out of school to care for sick relatives or to replace family income lost due to AIDS deaths. Orphans are also at higher risk of contracting HIV and much more likely to be forced to leave school.

Today, over 113 million children in the world’s poorest countries do not attend school, two-thirds of them girls. More than half of the countries that are not on track to reach the goal of universal primary education are also those worst affected by HIV/AIDS. The Global Campaign for Education estimates that if all children received a primary education, as many as 700,000 cases of HIV could be prevented each year. In particular, education is a powerful tool for reducing the social and economic vulnerability that exposes girls and orphans to a high risk of HIV/AIDS. Specifically, girls’ education can significantly reduce HIV infection rates by encouraging poverty reduction, gender equality, female empowerment, and awareness of human rights. Education also contributes to female economic independence, delayed marriage, family planning, improved child survival, and work outside the home—all of which can slow and reverse the spread of HIV.

In order to expand educational opportunities for girls and orphans and reduce their risk of contracting HIV infection, the Global AIDS Alliance recommends:

- ◆ **Eliminate School-Related Fees.** School-related fees prevent millions of children, particularly girls and orphans, from attending school.
- ◆ **Mobilize Additional Resources to Achieve Universal Basic Education.** Poor countries need assistance in order to scale up and improve educational systems, as well as to eliminate school fees.
- ◆ **Reform Financing and Delivery Mechanisms.** There is an urgent need to reform and accelerate the impact of bilateral education investments and the multilateral Education for All–Fast Track Initiative.

II. POLICY ANALYSIS

Health and education drive economic and social progress and are the primary means of reducing the poverty that prevents developing countries from achieving their full potential. While much remains to be done, important progress is under way to improve health in the world’s poorest countries. In particular, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria offers a promising new mechanism for mobilizing an expanded response to three of the world’s leading killers.

The Global AIDS Alliance strongly believes that ensuring universal basic education must be the next major priority toward slowing the spread of AIDS, supporting orphans, and reducing global poverty. Experts agree that basic education ranks among the most effective—and cost-effective—means of HIV prevention. In particular, providing educational opportunities for girls and orphans, who are often excluded from school and at disproportionate risk of HIV infection, will help slow the spread of AIDS.

Young people ages 15 to 24 now account for 60% of new HIV infections in many countries. At the same time, AIDS is exacerbating the already desperate situation of children worldwide—devastating families and community support systems, reducing the resources available for basic health, education, and nutrition services, and forcing many youngsters to become caretakers for HIV-infected parents and other family members.

A. Girls Are Especially Vulnerable to HIV/AIDS

The physiology of the female genital tract makes women twice as likely to acquire HIV from men as vice versa, and young women are especially vulnerable. Indeed, HIV is spreading faster among teenage girls than in any other group, primarily through sexual relationships with older men who have had much more sexual experience and are more likely to be HIV-infected. In the worst affected areas in sub-Saharan Africa, HIV infection rates among girls ages 15 to 19 are five to six times those of boys in the same age range.

Girls' biological vulnerability to HIV is compounded by a host of factors that put them at special risk, including poverty, gender inequality, lack of educational opportunities, and practices such as female genital mutilation. Child-rearing practices and initiation messages encourage girls to be nonassertive and to accept subordinate status in relation to men. And social and cultural norms inhibit girls' discussion of sexual health and accord inferior status to girls. Finally, as parents fall ill and die of AIDS, family burdens shift to children. Students—especially girls—are often forced to leave school and take on adult responsibilities, such as earning income, procuring food, and caring for the ill. In many cases, these responsibilities can only be fulfilled by selling sex for money. In addition:

- ◆ Girls lack the power to protect themselves against sexual violence. In South Africa, 40 to 47% of all rapes involve girls aged 15 or younger.
- ◆ Child marriage is another risk factor for girls. Few girls continue to attend school after marrying, and many are exposed to HIV by their husbands. In fact, married adolescent girls tend to have higher HIV infection rates than their sexually active unmarried peers.
- ◆ Perversely, poorly monitored schools can pose a danger to girls. In one Ugandan district, 31% of schoolgirls reported being sexually abused, mainly by teachers. And many girls are harassed traveling to and from school.

B. Orphans Are Also at Disproportionate Risk of HIV

HIV/AIDS is leaving a generation of orphans in its wake. Over 14 million children have already lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS—the equivalent of every child under five in America. It is projected that 25 million children will be orphaned by the year 2010. Orphans are more likely than other children to become homeless, to be the victims of sexual violence or trafficking, or to be taken out of school—all of which increase their risk of HIV. Not surprisingly, orphaned girls are particularly vulnerable to HIV. Removed from school, many are forced to survive by providing sex for food or money.

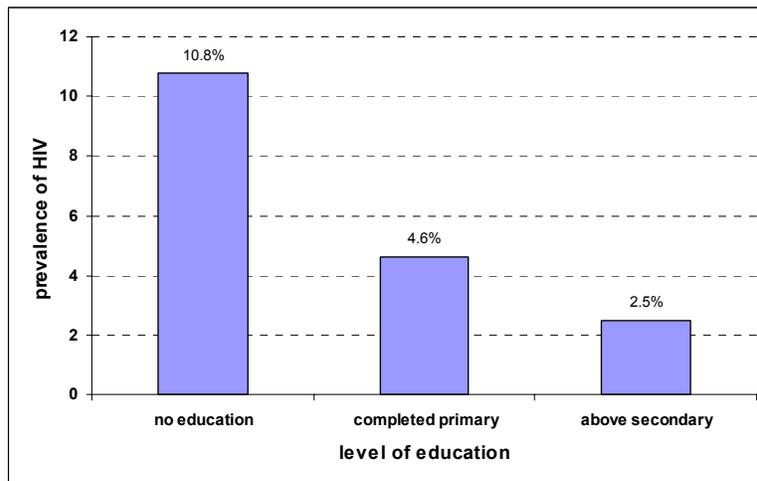
C. A Clear Link Between Increased Education and Reduced HIV Infections

Millions of young people lack information or have misconceptions about HIV/AIDS, and girls are generally more poorly informed than boys. But basic education can equip children with the skills and knowledge they need in order to avoid HIV infection. Indeed, education correlates directly to better knowledge, safer behavior, and reduced HIV infection rates. The Global Campaign for Education estimates that if all children received a complete primary education, as many as

700,000 cases of HIV could be prevented each year. In addition, of course, sex education that addresses HIV prevention is essential.

Research clearly shows that better educated people have lower rates of infection, especially among younger people. Girls who are enrolled in school are much less likely to be sexually active, and better-educated girls tend to delay having sex and are more likely to require their partners to use condoms. A recent study from rural Uganda shows the positive impact of education on reducing HIV prevalence:

**HIV Prevalence by Level of Education
Rural Uganda, 2002— Individuals aged 18-29**



Source: De Walque and J Whitworth, MRC Uganda (2002)

D. Education Empowers Girls

Education is critical to helping girls achieve economic independence. A 19-country study by the International Center for Research on Women found that the lower women’s social status, the higher their rate of HIV infection. Ultimately, better-educated girls are more likely to delay marriage and childbearing, have fewer children and healthier babies, enjoy better earning potential, and avoid commercial sex.

III. DEFINING AN ADVOCACY AGENDA

Today, over 113 million children in the world’s poorest countries do not attend school, two-thirds of them girls. UNICEF estimates that international education aid has fallen by 30% over the past decade. And HIV/AIDS is seriously threatening education systems—killing teachers and administrators, increasing absenteeism, and lowering productivity, all of which increase costs to struggling school systems. At least 55 of the poorest countries seem unlikely to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of universal basic education by 2015, and 31 of these countries are also among the 36 worst affected by HIV/AIDS. Clearly, new approaches are needed in order to accelerate progress toward this critically important goal.

A. Eliminate School-Related Fees

In the poorest countries, school-related fees keep millions of children out of school. In nearly all countries, separate fees are assessed on various aspects of education, including tuition, textbooks and equipment, uniforms, Parent Teacher Association membership, and community and building services. Many mothers dying from HIV are most concerned with who will pay their children's school fees. And the cost of school fees often prevents people from adopting orphans either formally or informally.

Conversely, eliminating such fees dramatically expands school enrollment. When Kenya eliminated primary school fees in 2003, enrollment jumped by 22% in just a few days. In Uganda, school enrollment jumped by 40% after debt relief funds were used to eliminate school fees three years ago. In addition, eliminating school fees is a cost-effective means of dramatically expanding educational access. For example, the total cost of eliminating school fees in Swaziland, the nation with the highest HIV/AIDS rate in the world, would total roughly \$20 million. Many other countries that have been heavily impacted by the AIDS epidemic continue to impose school-related fees.

Abolition of school fees was recently identified as the first "quick win" priority in The Millennium Project's recent report, "Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals," and was included as a specific recommendation in "Our Common Interest," the Blair Commission for Africa's report earlier this year:

"African governments should undertake to remove school fees for basic education, and donors should fund this until countries can afford these costs themselves. This should be part of a coherent strategy for education, properly sequenced so the quality is not reduced with the massive increase in enrollment likely. The impacts will benefit all children and will be particularly strong for girls— in Uganda when user fees were removed, enrollment of the poorest girls doubled." —*"Our Common Interest," Blair Commission for Africa*

B. Mobilize Additional Resources to Achieve Universal Basic Education

The poorest countries need assistance in order to scale up and improve educational systems. Specifically, funds are needed to train teachers, strengthen and expand infrastructure, buy textbooks and equipment, ensure quality, and introduce computer technologies. Additional resources are also needed to leverage the elimination of school fees and underwrite the transitional costs to governments of eliminating fees and meeting increased demand for education. Importantly, these resources must be channeled to local communities as needed to replace the revenues lost through the elimination of school-related fees.

In the few countries that have eliminated school fees, an influx of new students has created serious challenges for the existing educational system. But increased public and political attention to the growing demands on the nation's schools soon catalyzed the resources needed to scale up services and achieve quality improvements.

Foreign aid for education totals about \$1.5 billion a year, and the Global Campaign for Education estimates that roughly \$7 billion per year in external funding will be needed to achieve universal basic education. This sum takes into account the additional resources needed to enhance girls' enrollment, address the impact of AIDS on school systems, and support education in countries experiencing conflicts and other emergencies. A fair-share U.S. contribution of one-third of the amount needed to achieve universal basic education would be roughly \$2.34 billion per year.

Additional resources will be needed to achieve the goal of establishing schools as community-based centers for the provision of comprehensive services for orphaned and vulnerable children, e.g., food and nutrition, immunization, psychosocial support, etc.

C. Reform Financing and Delivery Mechanisms

Countless small-scale projects have proven successful in expanding educational access. To help ramp up these successful models, the Education for All–Fast Track Initiative (FTI) was launched in 2002. Housed at the World Bank, FTI is a partnership of developing countries and donors created to help low-income countries achieve the Millennium Development Goal of universal basic education by 2015. Thirteen countries are now ready to implement FTI, but there is a \$1.5 billion funding gap. (Another seven countries are expected to endorse FTI by the end of 2005.)

Annual bilateral aid to basic education in Africa has averaged only \$419 million in recent years (2000–2003). In addition:

- 60% of bilateral aid to education goes to post-secondary education, which mainly benefits the children of the more affluent.
- 12% of bilateral aid to education reaches the 15 countries with the largest gender gaps in education.
- 70% of aid to education comes in the form of technical cooperation—more than twice the average across all sectors of development assistance. The remaining 30% is heavily biased toward capital investments rather than recurring costs.
- A large share of aid to basic education is project rather than programme funding, leaving governments to juggle dozens of donor-initiated projects that have a relatively small net value.

Clearly, existing efforts to achieve universal basic education, including bilateral programs and the multilateral Fast Track Initiative, are not getting the job done. A new approach is needed to take best practices and scale them up dramatically. Specifically, the Global AIDS Alliance recommends advocacy for the reform of these mechanisms and/or the creation of a new financing and delivery mechanism to accelerate access to basic education.

Specific reforms should include the acceleration of public-private partnerships, a commitment to locally driven strategic plans, improved monitoring of international standards of accountability, strong civil-society role in governance and monitoring, and expanded use of information technology to achieve results. In particular, the accelerated introduction of new information technologies would help country-level stakeholders “leap frog” progress toward both broader educational access and improved educational quality.

IV. CONCLUSION

Providing a basic education to children—while ensuring equal opportunities for girls and orphans—offers a critical window of hope in responding to the AIDS epidemic. In addition, enhancing educational access for girls and orphans will help achieve several of the Millennium Development Goals unanimously adopted by 189 member countries of the United Nations in September 2000, including reducing poverty, achieving universal primary education, improving gender equality, and lowering the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Finally, getting girls into school matters because educated women improve the health and well-being of families, have fewer children, and do more to educate children.

Acceleration of progress toward achieving universal primary education will require results-based advocacy that seeks to achieve real political impact and secure concrete benefits for people in impoverished countries. Policymakers must be persuaded to allocate the necessary resources through reformed financing mechanisms that are held accountable for achieving measurable, on-the-ground impact in terms of enabling more children to secure a basic education.

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Small Change: An Alternative Progress Report on the Education Fast Track Initiative, Global Campaign for Education, March 2005 (draft).

User Fees in Primary Education, The World Bank, July 2004.

What Works in Girls' Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World, Council of Foreign Relations, 2004.

ONLINE RESOURCES:

Education for All–Fast Track Initiative, www.worldbank.org/education/efafti/

Global Campaign for Education, www.campaignforeducation.org/

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), www.unaids.org

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), www.unicef.org

United Nations Population Fund (UNPF), www.unfpa.org