

United Nations

Nations Unies

The first strategic priority is to strengthen opportunities for post-primary education. The good news is gender disparities in primary enrollment and completion ratios have been substantially reduced, especially among low and lower middle income countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. But gaps persist. Low female to male primary enrollment ratios remain in some low income countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Most countries achieved gender parity in secondary education enrollment in 2005. But gender parity ratios were below .90 in 34 low and lower middle income countries in sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia Pacific, Middle East and North Africa, and South Asia. Reverse gender gaps—fewer boys than girls—in secondary enrollment persist in 23 countries in Latin America, 12 countries in East Asia, and seven countries in the Middle East and North Africa, a worrisome trend that should be monitored. Progress toward gender parity in secondary completion cannot be assessed because data do not exist.

A recent report by Cynthia Lloyd from Population Council for the Coalition for Adolescent Girls (CAG) reiterates the Task Force recommendation to expand opportunities for girls to attend secondary school. We all agree that governments should define basic education as education through lower secondary school or to age 16. To do this, the Population Council report notes that governments and the private sector will need to increase the number of formal and non-formal secondary school places in the educational system - by extending existing primary school facilities and offering well-targeted subsidies to disadvantaged girls to attend either public or private secondary schools. The Population Council report also calls attention to a number of other key interventions, including supporting the non-formal education system, producing curricula that is relevant to adolescent girls, and offering post-secondary vocational programs.

Post-secondary vocational programs are particularly important from an economic perspective. The majority of girls who complete secondary school do not continue on to university. Those girls need programs that support them in making a successful transition to remunerative work and household financial management. Such programs must be based on market assessments and provide relevant, flexible skills for employment and professional growth in an ever-changing global economy.

To complement these interventions, the UN system can help to build and maintain a global database – accessible to all - that includes several components: data on completion rates at all levels of education, data on the quality of education, and information on the variety of education programs that exist for adolescents, including the Population Council report suggestion of promising models appropriate to girls' educational needs in different settings.

The second strategic priority is to guarantee women's reproductive health and rights. Among other things, the Task Force recommended focusing on improving adolescent health and reducing maternal mortality.

Adolescent fertility rates have decreased globally over the past decade. But in low and lower middle income countries, adolescent fertility rates remain high when compared to developed countries, where the fertility rate hovers at 12.08 live births per 1,000 adolescents. All low and middle income countries in developing regions had higher adolescent fertility rates ranging from 14.32 in upper middle income countries in the Middle East and North Africa to a high of 119.41 live births per 1,000 adolescents for low income countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In some parts of the developing world, such as South Asia, a large proportion of adolescent fertility occurs within marriage, highlighting the need to increase age at marriage. Child marriage, in fact, is a manifestation of girls' powerlessness and a driver of health risks. The Coalition for Adolescent Girls, along with others, urges international agencies to identify the practice, affecting at least half of all girls in about a dozen countries, as a human rights violation. This body could usefully take that up. In addition, girls need national laws to prevent child marriage, along with donor support for national responses—for example, marriage registration systems and incentive schemes to keep girls in school—and programs to mobilize communities and create viable alternatives to marriage.

The Coalition for Adolescent Girls report on adolescent health by Miriam Temin and Ruth Levine of the Center for Global Development has expanded on the Task Force recommendations for this priority population. Because young women have a high HIV prevalence in many countries, and often have higher prevalence than men, HIV prevention needs to be focused on adolescent girls, especially in the hyper-endemic countries. This means supporting efforts to transform harmful social norms, ensuring that essential services and commodities are in place for girls, educating girls about avoiding HIV/AIDS as part of comprehensive sexuality education, and working with boys and men to change their behavior—for themselves and their partners.

[By the way, using data from a limited set of program experiences, the Center for Global Development estimates that the average annual costs of a full set of priority interventions for adolescent girls in the 10- to 19-year-old age range in low- and low-middle-income countries during 2010–2015 is \$359.31 per girl—or about \$1 a day.]

Of the data that my colleagues and I reviewed recently, the least progress has been made on maternal mortality, even in the context of greater overall attention to reproductive health and increases in resources. One reason that improvements in maternal health have not been more rapid is that health systems are not working – either for adolescents or for mothers. We have known for quite some time that maternal deaths can be treated with relatively simple, well-known interventions, collectively known as emergency obstetric care (EmOC), delivered at the health center or district hospital level. Several countries – despite income constraints – including Sri Lanka, Honduras, Vietnam, and Bangladesh – have made incredible progress in lowering maternal deaths and offer lessons for other countries to follow suit.

The third strategic priority is investment in infrastructure to reduce women's time burdens. In most rural communities in low-income and some middle-income countries, women and girls (and sometimes boys) compensate for infrastructure deficits: the lack of

electricity or other fuel sources, the lack of water and sanitation facilities, and the lack of roads and motorized transport. Many countries have invested in large-scale infrastructure projects, especially energy, but few countries have collected the data to track how those investments impact women's and men's time use and work burdens. Moreover, less progress has been made on scaling up a range of other low-cost technologies that both reduce the time that women spend compensating for lack of infrastructure and enable them to earn income; these include decentralized village power systems using diesel-powered mini-grids for charging batteries that can be carried to households and direct current batteries that can operate fluorescent-current lamps.

The fourth strategic priority is reducing gender gaps in employment. More women participate in employment now than ever before, reflecting the growth in economic opportunities available to them. Women's share of nonagricultural employment has risen or stayed the same in all regions since 2000, yet in most countries around the world, females face inferior employment opportunities relative to males, which is why the Task Force urged a specific emphasis on informal employment, wages and occupational segregation.

Prior to the crisis, gender wage gaps had risen in some parts of the world and fallen in others. (In many developed countries, wage gaps narrowed as women's educational attainment and labor market experience improved. Similarly, relative wages for women compared with men appear to have risen in several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the exception of Honduras, Jamaica and Venezuela.)

There is of course the danger that whatever progress women have made in the labor market will reverse because of the current crisis. This is an issue in both developed and developing economies.¹ Employment is not expected to return to pre-crisis levels until 2017, making economic stimulus a priority.

In many countries, women are often at the back 6 -1.15 Tdectd1604prnplym epected to Eer pnt las,(en)]T

In the context of the current crisis, we can't overlook those in informal employment. There is a common misconception that the informal economy serves as a cushion for formal workers who lose their jobs. While that is true, this does not mean that those working in the informal economy necessarily thrive. In fact, economic downturns often affect the informal economy in the same ways as they affect the formal economy. Like formal wage workers, informal wage workers face loss of jobs or (further) informalization of their employment contracts. Specific bail-outs or rescue plans should be developed in consultation with different groups of working poor that would help them maintain existing employment opportunities during the crisis or secure new employment opportunities after the crisis.

The fifth strategic priority is increasing women's ownership and control over productive assets. I'll highlight only two of the many dimensions involved in increasing women's property ownership. The first is measurement of the gender asset gap. I have become tired of complaining about the lack of sex-disaggregated information on physical and financial assets, so with the support of the Dutch MDG3 Fund, I am working with colleagues in universities in Ghana, Ecuador, and India to implement a nationally representative household survey in Ecuador and Ghana, and state level household survey in Karnataka, India that asks adult males and females about ownership, valuation, decision-making, control over, and disposal of assets such as land, housing, livestock, non-farm businesses, and financial assets. Our aim is two-fold: to create an indicator for MDG tracking of the gender asset gap, and to determine the minimal number of questions on sex-disaggregated asset ownership that all countries can add at little cost to their census or living standard surveys.

The second dimension is how to increase women's ownership of productive assets. Many countries – like India – have begun to pass good legislation recognizing women's ability to own assets. But this is not enough. Reconciling entrenched social norms with national laws requires change at the community level, where the needs and benefits are most easily seen and addressed. Worldwide, community-based initiatives are attempting to identify and eliminate the factors that prevent women from fulfilling their rights. These factors include a lack of legal knowledge on statutory rights among women and communities, women's limited resources and documentation, crises that exacerbate women's insecure property rights, interpretation of customary and religious laws that in practice overrule statutory protections, and economic and demographic changes that affect land tenure. Many creative approaches exist to address these constraints which require resources to scale up for greater impact.

Finally, the last strategic priority I will mention is action to combat violence against women. As you know, gender-based violence is arguably the most widespread of all human rights violations, is a pervasive and systemic public health issue affecting all socio-economic and cultural groups throughout the world, and involves high costs to both individuals and societies. It increases in times of crisis. There are many good government initiatives such as Bangladesh's Multi-Sectoral Program on Violence against Women, Morocco's recent national plan to address violence against women, and Uganda's pending Domestic Violence Bill. But our governments and international donors

created) *cannot* be seen as the sole international source of financing for gender equality, since resources also need to be allocated to address gender issues throughout all other multilateral and bilateral funding streams – whether for agriculture and food production, health, education, water and sanitation, transportation and other infrastructure, employment, environmental sustainability, climate change, and so forth.

I would like to close with a comment on the future. The current crisis will pass, but crises will not. Ravi Kanbur, an economist at Cornell, recently noted that for developing countries, periodic crises are likely to be the “new normal.” I would argue that periodic crises have been the “new normal” all along in developing countries, known all too well to those who suffered through the debt crises in the 1980s, the financial ll

References for further reading:

Grown, Caren, Geeta Rao Gupta, and Aslihan Kes (2008) *Seven Priorities, Seven Years to Go*. Washington, DC: ICRW. http://www.icrw.org/DOCS/2008/ICRW_MDG.PDF

Grown, Caren, Chandrika Bahadur, Diane Elson, and Jesse Handbury (2008) “The Financial Requirements of Achieving Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment” in *Equality for Women: Where Do We Stand on Millennium Development Goal 3?* Mayra Buvinic, Andrew Morrison, A. Waafus Oforu-Amaah, and Mirja Sjoblom, eds., Washington, DC: World Bank.

Grown, Caren, Geeta Rao Gupta, and Aslihan Kes (2005) *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women*. London: Earthscan Press.

Grown, Caren and Imraan Valodia (2010) *Taxation and Gender Equity: A Comparative Analysis of Direct and Indirect Taxes in Developed and Developing Countries*. London: Routledge.

Lloyd, Cynthia (2009) *New Lessons: The Power of Educating Adolescent Girls*. New York: The Population Council.
http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/2009PGY_NewLessons.pdf

Temin, Miriam and Ruth Levine (2009) *Start with a Girl: A New Agenda for Global Health*. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.
http://www.coalitionforadolescentgirls.org/start_with_a_girl