

Investing in Education Means Healthier Communities

Today, nearly 70 million children around the world do not have access to basic education. Educated children grow up to earn higher wages, contribute to stronger economies, support healthier and more prosperous families, and create more stable and secure societies. Making sure the millions of out-of-school children have access to an education will require U.S. leadership for a new, multilateral education initiative.

A quality basic education helps people develop the skills that allow them to make healthy decisions for themselves and their children. Studies show that investing in education improves maternal and child health, reduces malnutrition, and reduces the incidence of HIV/AIDS.

Fast Facts

- In Africa alone, 4.5 million children die each year before reaching their 5th birthday, but children of mothers with a full primary education are 40 percent more likely to survive to age 5.
- The largest contributing factor to reducing child malnutrition has been the education of women – even more so than direct food aid.
- Worldwide, 700,000 HIV cases could be prevented each year if all children received a primary education.

Improving Maternal and Child Health

Studies show that investing in the education of girls and women can significantly improve their health when they become mothers, as well as the health of their children.

- Every year about 600,000 mothers die as a result of complications of pregnancy and childbirth. Offering equal education opportunities for women helps reduce maternal mortality. Rates of maternal mortality are higher in countries where the female literacy rate is lower than the male literacy rate.
- In Nigeria, children of mothers without an education have about a 2.5 times higher risk of death than children of mothers with a secondary education.
- Children of mothers with a primary education are 50 percent more likely to receive life-saving immunizations.

Reducing Malnutrition

Every 7 seconds, a child dies of hunger-related causes. Education can help reduce malnutrition by increasing agricultural productivity and giving people the knowledge they need to make smart decisions about food. Investing in education for women and girls has even greater potential for reducing malnutrition around the world.

- Just four years of primary schooling can boost a farmers' productivity by nearly 9 percent.
- In developing countries, women produce 60 to 80 percent of food crops. In Sub-Saharan Africa, investing in education of women has the potential to boost agricultural output by 25 percent.
- In a study of children under age 5 in Bangladesh, more than half of children of mothers unable to read were severely malnourished. The level of malnourishment dropped drastically among children of women with a secondary or higher education.

Preventing HIV/AIDS

Often called the "social vaccine," studies show that education can reduce the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission. Schools can also play an integral role in fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic by disseminating information about HIV prevention and treatment to students, teachers, parents, and organizations outside the school community.

- Even without HIV-specific interventions, a good quality education offers protection against HIV by providing information and skills, and developing the values that help young people make smart choices.
- A study of HIV/AIDS prevention programs in schools in western Kenya demonstrated that simply lowering the cost of education by offering free school uniforms reduced the risk that a girl would enter an early marriage by 12 percent. Girls were also 10 percent less likely to begin childbearing during the course of the study.
- Because nearly half of new HIV infections occur in youth aged 15 to 24, the primary education years are optimal for addressing HIV/AIDS prevention in education.

Losing Ground to HIV

HIV/AIDS continues to stymie progress in securing thriving educational systems. In countries severely affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, public funds are often diverted from a variety of sectors, including education, to fund the health sector.

- The education sector is particularly vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Studies show that HIV affects teacher absenteeism and turnover rates. To make up for teacher turnover and deaths due to HIV/AIDS, one study estimates that Sub-Saharan Africa will need to recruit 4.4 percent more teachers above and beyond what is already needed to achieve Education for All.
- Worldwide, 2 million children under the age of 15 are living with HIV/AIDS – 90 percent of them in Sub-Saharan Africa. Young people aged 15-24 account for 45 percent of new HIV/AIDS infections.
- HIV has increased the likelihood that children are pulled out of school to work or care for sick family members. Children orphaned by AIDS are even more likely to work in the informal sector or in the commercial sex trade.