

Girls' Education

Your NGO Can Help: Take On the Challenge

"When we educate a girl today, we also help to create a leader for tomorrow...."

—Hillary Rodham Clinton,
First Lady, USA.

*"If you educate a man you educate a person,
but if you educate a woman you educate a family."*

—Ruby Manikan, Church Leader



Abigail Harris

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Why Is Girls' Education Important? Education increases the productivity of girls and women, both inside and outside the home, helping to free them from the cycle of poverty. An educated woman is more likely than an uneducated one to be self-employed or to have paid employment, thus increasing household resources. She will have fewer children, and those she does have are more likely to be healthy and better educated.

To these ends, NGOs like yours have an opportunity and obligation to take a leadership role in educating girls.

What Have NGOs Achieved to Date?

For over 30 years, NGOs have been at the forefront of improving women's and girls' social and economic rights. Indeed, NGOs were among the first to note the links between education, economics, and social benefits and have long promoted the idea that girls' education is good for individuals, families, communities, and nations. NGOs are recognized champions of women's and girls' rights to be free from all forms of violence and abuse, to live in a healthy environment, and to act as decision makers in the commercial, cultural, and political life of their nations.

What Are the Problems That Remain?

Girls in the developing world are educationally disadvantaged. The educationally disadvantaged of today become the economically disadvantaged of tomorrow—and the target clients of many NGOs. Did you know that:

- Of the estimated 960 million illiterate people in the world, two-thirds are female?
- In rural areas of some countries, the female illiteracy rate exceeds 95 percent?
- Nearly 60 percent of the world's 6- to 11-year-olds who are out of school are girls?

- Children from poor families are the least likely to be educated, thus perpetuating their poverty and that of their children?

How Have NGOs Been Called Upon to Act?

The 1993 Pan African Conference on the Education of Girls called for "regional, bilateral and international agencies and NGOs to make the education of girls the number one priority in their development programs." Similarly, the Platform of Action from the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women urges NGOs to help eradicate female illiteracy, to allocate resources for implementing and monitoring educational reforms, and to promote lifelong education and training for girls and women.

What Can You Do?

NGOs can help free girls from ignorance by making girls' access to education their top priority. Since NGOs operate at the local community level, they are best positioned to work with the community in improving girls' education.

In this spirit, you can work to:

- Include girls' education as an integral part of your NGO's programs.
- Build partnerships with the private and government sectors to design and implement projects and programs that get and keep more girls in school.
- Work to strengthen parent-teacher associations in communities where the NGO operates and assist the community to support girls' education.
- Develop a *Partners with Parents Program* to explore how the NGO can work with parents to support girls' education in the community.
- Start or support fundraising activities for girls' education.
- Lead community dialogues on how to enroll girls in school and help them to stay in school.

- Establish regular tutoring and mentoring relationships for and with girls.
- Support teachers through a *Mentors and Models Program*.
- Make sure the ministry, businesses, religious leaders, and civic organizations are aware that your NGO is an advocate for girls' education and is actively seeking to help.
- Work with local communities to eliminate their specific barriers to girls' attending and completing school. Take a personal interest.
- Encourage girls to visit your organization to learn more about the work your NGO is doing for girls and women.
- Promote a *Role of Women in Work Day* at school so children can better understand the positive impact that women have locally, regionally, and nationally.
- Work with media and public relations professionals to start a *We Care About Girls' Education Campaign* and develop logos, posters, public service announcements, and informational programs in support of girls' education.
- Educate other NGOs and community development and support groups about the importance of girls' education.
- Promote participation of women in commercial, community, and cultural life at the local and district level.
- Advocate for legal and social reform in support of girls' education and propose specific policies to address the problems.

**IMAGINE A WORLD WHERE EVERY GIRL
GOES TO SCHOOL!**

**THEN ACT...
FOR THE GIRLS OF TODAY,
FOR THE WOMEN OF TOMORROW.**

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