



Preface

At the Center for Global Development we aim to stimulate new thinking on longstanding development problems, particularly problems for which it is possible to imagine how a change in attitudes or practices in the rich world could improve lives in the poor world. The problem of children, especially girls, failing to attend school, is a classic one. No one disagrees that girls ought to go to school—for their own sake and because educating girls ensures a better future for their children and their societies. Many donors express a willingness to finance increased access to better schooling, especially for girls. There is universal support for the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by 2015. And in fact, progress in expanding education in developing countries has been impressive in the last two decades and girls have benefited as enrollment rates, especially in primary schooling, have increased dramatically.

But the limits of standard approaches to achieving near-universal education (building more schools, training more teachers, providing essential learning materials) are evident. More than 75 million children are not enrolled in school or are not attending school regularly; many who attend learn little and fail to complete primary school. One worrying example of that reality: in some countries primary school enrollment among girls who are members of excluded groups—social *minorities*—is below 50 percent.

One year ago we published a book by Maureen Lewis (a then senior fellow at the Center) and Marlaine Lockheed,

Inexcusable Absence: Why 60 Million Girls Still Aren't In School and What to Do About It, which illuminated this simple but stunning fact: three-quarters of girls who are not attending school around the world are members of groups that are socially marginal or excluded in the country where they live. That book set out practical approaches to address the problem, including anti-discrimination programs, cash grants to families to increase the demand for schooling in social groups where demand is low, and special efforts to improve the quality and outreach of schools in marginalized communities.

This new book, edited by Lewis and Lockheed, includes the more detailed technical analysis and the country case studies on which much of *Inexcusable Absence* is based. The technical analysis addresses the role of ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity in explaining differences across countries in school enrollment. The case studies cover heterogeneous countries—Lao PDR (Hmong Hill Tribes), China (ethnic minorities), Pakistan (Balouchi and other isolated tribes in outlying provinces), India (scheduled castes and scheduled tribes), and Guatemala (indigenous groups)—where girls from minority groups are especially disadvantaged. They also cover two homogenous countries—Bangladesh and Tunisia—where both NGO and government programs have successfully changed attitudes and behavior surrounding girls' education with the result that both countries have reached parity in education.

At the Center for Global Development we have taken a special interest in the problem of education in the developing world and the particular challenges faced by girls. One of our earliest books (Samuel Morley and David Coady, *From Social Assistance to Social Development: Targeted Education Subsidies in Developing Countries*) highlighted the benefits of conditional cash transfers for poverty alleviation and for education. In 2003–2004 I co-chaired the United Nations Millennium Project Task Force on Education, which focused on new ways to increase demand for schooling where poverty and culture limit parents' demand and to improve the supply of schooling where poor public policy and limited capacity are constraints. In that work we emphasized the need for much more attention to the role of incentives and institutions within countries.

I am delighted that in *Inexcusable Absence* and this new book, Lewis and Lockheed have defined a heretofore neglected part of the larger challenge: girls in socially excluded groups. They provide ideas for an agenda that ought to be taken up eagerly—by the countries themselves covered in this volume, and by the donor community, which has promised that money (and it is not a great amount) will not be the constraint to every child in the developing world, girl or boy, minority or majority group member, completing primary school.

In doing our work on girls' education, we have benefited from the special support and encouragement of two of our Board members, Belinda Stronach, a former Member of Parliament in Canada, and our Board Chair, Edward W. Scott, Jr. Both are deeply committed to improving the status of women in the developing world. Preparation and publication of the book and briefing materials was made possible

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