



Missing the Mark: Girls' Education and the Way Forward

Conference Report Highlights



Ten Years After Beijing, Hillary Clinton Fights on for Women's Rights

In introducing **Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY)**, ICRW President **Geeta Rao Gupta** said it was Clinton's historic speech as first lady 10 years ago at the United Nation's Beijing Conference on Women that *"marked the turning point ... at which the world finally began to recognize that women's rights are human rights."* Clinton *"has since continued to carry the torch on women's rights and gender equality,"* noted Gupta.

The New York senator said that investing in basic education in poor countries *"is a smart investment in our security future."* Supporting quality education for girls is also "one of the best ways to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS"

"Failure to provide an adequate education has real consequences, for families, for individuals, but also for the global economy, for national advancement, for national security," said Clinton. *"There is no way to put a dollar figure on the limitless potential that is lost because children are not able to be educated up to their God-given potential."*

In Muslim countries without free primary education, the vacuum may be filled by religious schools that may boys to hate, she said. Those unmoved by humanitarian arguments should at least be moved by the security argument, she said.

Clinton recently visited Afghanistan, where she said *"schools have mushroomed all over the country"* and where despite some lingering religious objections, *"the overwhelming majority of people wanted their girls to go to school."*

"To guarantee women equal rights and to make our world in my opinion more peaceful and secure, it is in everyone's interests to continue to try to meet the Millennium Development Goals, and education must be the foundation of any strategy to do so," she said.

Clinton said two generations of educated children may have been lost due to the imposition of school fees in poor countries in past decades at the insistence of

international agencies that regarded fees as a means of instilling personal responsibility. Clinton called the fees a horrible, absurd idea that only *“made sense in some air conditioned office in Washington or London.”*

Last fall the New York senator introduced the Education for All Act, which would increase U.S. foreign assistance by \$500 million to start and eventually by \$2.5 billion a year to help developing nations hire teachers and provide schooling for all children. That bill is a long way from passage, but Congress did appropriate \$400 million last year under the 9/11 Implementation Act to promote free, universal basic education in Muslim countries.

“We may not make it this year (on Education for All), but if we keep creeping up in regular appropriations,” and keep funding U.S. Agency for International Development programs, Clinton said, *“we’ll slowly but surely make progress.”*

UN Millennium Project Director Jeffrey Sachs delivered an appeal for Washington to take seriously the Millennium Goals and to ratchet up U.S. development aid [See *Cutting Through Washington’s ‘Vaporous Words’*].

The conference then heard from **Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-NE)**, whom **Nancy Birdsall** introduced as a strong voice from the heartland for *“a wise, measured approach to foreign policy”* that recognizes the importance of balancing defense, diplomacy and development.

Hagel said education holds the key to building a more peaceful and prosperous world. Americans became accustomed after World War II to looking at the world through their own lens. Now, after the September 11, 2001, attacks and \$50-a-barrel oil, it is clear that Americans must take a much wider view *“and see how the rest of the world sees us.”*

“Armies and divisions of soldiers will not change” the world, said Hagel, who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on International Economic Policy, Export, and Trade Promotion. A strong military is a critical component of U.S. policy, *“but that alone won’t change things.... It will be education. It will be empowering all the peoples of the world.”*

“Education is the essence of human progress. Education is the foundation for empowerment. We have a long way to go, especially in educating women and girls,” the senator said. *“We have made some progress (but) we are not even near the edge of where we need to go on this issue.”*

Hagel spoke with pride about the role his alma mater, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, has played in training Afghani teachers. *“Those are model programs that I have used to entice some of my colleagues to become more engaged,”* he said.

In Washington, he said, policy is made far too often in isolation without full consideration of how problems are interconnected.

“We consider foreign policy some kind of nebulous, Kissingeresque pursuit,” he said. “Well, foreign policy is the framework for all our interests, for the world’s interests. Here we are in a world of 6.5 billion people, interconnected, global in every way, and we are not going to unwind that. We are in this together.”

“It will be you who really reshape the world. It will be you who lead the transformation of mankind,” Hagel told advocates for girls’ education.



Cutting Through Washington’s ‘Vaporous Words’

Jeffrey D. Sachs made his reputation as a macroeconomist advising governments around the globe how to fix sputtering economies. As the Director of the United Nations Millennium Project and special adviser to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan he tirelessly highlights the challenges of poverty, illiteracy, hunger and other development problems and speaks to the wealthiest nations in the world about their obligation to their neighbors.

At the *Missing the Mark* conference, held in a crowded hotel ballroom a few blocks from the U.S. Capitol, Sachs read a passage from the \$2.6 trillion budget request that President Bush submitted to Congress a few weeks earlier.

Today more than ever, U.S. foreign policy toward the developing world plays a vital role in the global balance between conflict and peace. U.S. national security challenges are increasingly complex and the role of development is recognized as pivotal. This is reflected in President Bush’s National Security Strategy of the United States, issued on Sept. 17, 2002, which for the first time elevated development as the third component of U.S. national security alongside defense and diplomacy.

On the same page of the budget, Sachs pointed out, the administration proposed a cut in developmental assistance of \$300 million and a separate \$300 million cut in aid for child survival programs.

“This is a city filled with vaporous words,” said Sachs, who had flown in from Ethiopia a day earlier. *“The ground realities are really very different.”*

“Women’s choice and women’s empowerment is vital to every aspect of economic development,” he said.

He said he was still carrying images he had seen in the past two weeks in travels across rural Kenya and Ethiopia – images of a child suffering convulsive seizures from cerebral

malaria for want of the right medicine; of two men lying head to foot in a single bed, one dying of AIDS, the other suffering from malaria; of children stunted by crop failures in a parched region; of a village woman who spends six hours a day bringing water from a distant spring.

“Girls and boys don’t go to school when their mothers are collecting water six hours a day,” said Sachs. *“These are not impossible problems to solve.... A diesel generator can pump water and save a whole village of women spending their entire lives of collecting unsafe drinking water.”*

“Why are we cutting the child survival budget right now? Why aren’t we leading the effort to get malaria under control?” he said. *“It would cost \$3 per person in the rich world. ... These communities are desperate for it.”*

“We’re very confused in this country. We blame the poor for their problems. We don’t understand the number of absolutely practical steps that communities are taking on their own and if we only help them, could actually succeed,” said Sachs. *“Children can stay alive, water can be safe, children can be in school, school meal programs can be provided.”*

The thirteen Millennium Project task force reports were replete with low cost, practical ways to address the world’s ills, he said. They do cost something, he said, and the reluctance of wealthy nations to do their part is *“why we are here with the first failed MDG in 2005 and on our way to seven other failures, because we’re faking it.... Our spin doesn’t work in Ethiopia, or... outside the Beltway.”*

He said the United States needs to follow through on its promise as part of the Monterey Consensus of 2002 to make *“concrete efforts”* to devote 0.7 percent of GDP to development assistance. U.S. aid now amounts to 0.16 percent of GDP.

“Ladies and gentleman, the only choice we have is whether we are living in the real world or the world of spin. I hope we choose reality,” said Sachs.



Confronting the Challenges for National Governments and Donors

The Task Force on Education and Gender Equity, in its January 2005 report, *Toward Universal Primary Education: Investments, Incentives, and Institutions*, bluntly warned that *“heroic efforts, not ‘more of the same’”* will be needed to close the education gap and give boys and girls equal opportunities in the 10 years ahead.

Amina J. Ibrahim, the national coordinator for Nigeria's Education for All program within the Federal Ministry of Education, was both a coordinator of the 30-member task force and, with Nancy Birdsall and CGD's **Ruth Levine**, a lead author of its 183-page report. At *Missing the Mark*, she led an international panel that discussed the challenges facing national governments and donors.

"We know what the problems are and what the issues are and how we can begin to tackle them," said Ibrahim. Africa and other continents for many years have served as *"a Petri dish of experiments on how to make it work. There is a huge body of information,"* she said. Less is known about *"how we go from successful pilots to making it work for the vast majority of the poor."*

Ibrahim said the debate has moved beyond the issue of good governance and whether donors' money would be *"thrown at systems that don't work, that are weak and corrupt."* Many poor countries have adopted credible plans for universal education. Those that abolished school fees have found themselves without the funds to hire and train teachers, so class size skyrocketed along with enrollments.

In parts of Nigeria the teacher-student ratio is 1 to 100 or 1 to 120, she said. *"There's nothing they can do about giving an education to those children. They will pass through education, but education won't pass through them."*

Donors, she complained, often impose multiple, overlapping demands on a country's education officials for what amounts to *"a pittance."* They insist on programs operating according to their time schedules, not the needs of the country's teachers and children. *"Who's in a hurry for who? Donors are constantly in a hurry to meet their deadlines. What about the deadlines of people?"* she asked. *"You're in a very, very convenient environment. Everything works for you. It doesn't work (for us). We don't have power. We don't have IT ... even in urban centers, even in capital centers."*

Vicky Colbert de Arboleda, executive director of the Escuela Nueva Back to the People Foundation in Colombia, said the foundation's low-cost, systemic model of multigrade schools has spread from rural to urban schools and been replicated across Latin America and the Philippines. Students work in small groups as active learners with teachers serving as facilitators, and community participation in the learning process is strongly encouraged.

"We have a lot of aspects that ensure girls' participation and strengthening self-esteem of girls and reducing stereotypes. Why? Because when you work in cooperative learning approaches, children learn to participate, to discuss and to accept different points of view," she said.

Desmond Bermingham of the U.K. Department For International Development (DFID) – the British counterpart to the U.S. Agency for International Development – said his government is committed to reaching the target of 0.7 percent GDP by 2012. *"We're talking in real money, not vaporous money,"* said Bermingham, who noted that the DFID

budget will rise from £4.5 billion to £6.3 billion by 2006-2007, and spending on education alone will reach £300 million per year.

Birmingham said the issue of girls' education "*is a real winner for us. It's one of those topics that it's very easy for people at home to think, 'Yes, of course, we should be supporting education for all girls in poor countries. Are we not doing it already? Why not? Why are you our government doing more?'*"

Birmingham acknowledged that the Fast Track Initiative "*has not delivered on what it promised.... We've learned that the fastest track is the in-country track, where you've got a strong government with a strong plan.*"

He also said major donors recognize the need to coordinate efforts. "*The challenge for donors is to talk less and listen more,*" he said.

Beth King, research manager for the World Bank's Development Research Group, stressed the importance of carefully parsing countries' data on enrollment of boys and girls. In some countries the gap is small in urban areas, but huge in rural sections.

Also, King said, "*It's not only about bringing girls to the school, it whether they learn something.... We think illiterate parents can't tell the difference between good education and bad education.*" But they can.

Nicholas Burnett, an economist who directs the Education for All, Global Monitoring Report team for UNESCO, said it was "*striking how many out of school girls are also in other excluded groups. They may be physically disabled. They may be in conflict countries or displaced people. They typically are rural. They may be from ethnic or linguistic minorities.*"

"*Let's not forget we're moving forward... (but) we cannot let up,*" said Burnett. Things that are widely known among the advocates attending the *Missing the Mark* conference are still not widely understood or known by the broader public.



The Importance of Secondary Education

While the Millennium Development Goals embraced universal primary education as a principal objective, international educators agreed that the world's poorest countries must improve secondary schools and opportunities for both boys and girls for the MDGs to succeed.

Geeta Rao Gupta said, "*if we want women and girls to not just get by, but actually thrive and do well, we need more*" than basic education. Citing ICRW research, she said, "*In*

most cases, only secondary or higher levels of schooling lead to improved options, opportunities and outcomes for women.”

It is a hollow victory for a country to achieve parity in secondary enrollments if only a minority of boys and girls make it to high school, she noted. Likewise, *“even completion is not enough, because what really matters is the quality of what is learned.”* In Tanzania, only 1 in 5 children finishing 7th grade passed competency tests in language and math.

Cynthia Lloyd, director of social science research for the Population Council and chair of the National Academy of Sciences Panel on Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries, said there are 1.5 billion young people ages 10 to 24 in developing countries. They will be 20 to 34 in 2015, and the NAS panel’s research found that *“failure to invest in the early stage of their lives are extremely unlikely to be compensated for (later).”*

The NAS panel also found that the lives of boys and girls in the developing world are similar as long as they remain in school. *“Only when they leave school do their lives and work roles differ,”* Lloyd said. Girls 15 to 17 who were still in school were less likely to have sex and more likely to use contraception if they did. Schools play an important role in keeping girls *“safe and healthy,”* she said.

Dilari Hafiz, the director of secondary and higher education for the Bangladesh Ministry of Education, said her country’s policy of paying stipends to girls to attend secondary school and compensating rural parents for the lost labor has *“worked wonders.”* Literacy rates have risen from 38 percent in 1994 to 62 percent in 2001, and education of girls has led to improvements in health and reduced fertility rates. *“Families are getting smaller and more women are being employed at higher wages,”* she said.

“My country has missed the mark – it’s a fact,” said Hafiz. *“But we are trying to work on our problems.”*

Cream Wright, the chief of UNESCO’s Education Section, reminded the conference that *“some of the countries that have a lot to do are also the same countries that have done the most in the past.”* He pointed to countries in the Middle East and North Africa as prime examples.

“Unfortunately, some of them need to do three times better,” Wright said. *“It’s not a question of progressing. It’s a question of how can we get these countries to make quantum leaps over a few years.”*



A Preemptive Policy For Winning Hearts And Minds

When President Bill Clinton dispatched chief economic adviser **Gene B. Sperling** to Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000 to represent the United States at the World Education Forum, he set in motion a chain of events still rippling through the international development policy world. Not only did the United States and 179 other countries commit themselves to the goal of a quality, basic education for all the world's children by 2015, but Sperling became personally and passionately convinced that universal education, especially for girls, was *the* answer to many of the social pathologies that leave millions around the world struggling daily for bare existence.

Nine months later, the White House changed hands, and Sperling became a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, where he created the Center for Universal Education. He served on the UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equity and last year coauthored with Barbara Herz a 103-page report, *What Works in Girls' Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World*. He also played an off-stage role in the creation of the Center for Global Development in 2001.

It fell to Sperling to deliver the final presentation at *Missing the Mark* and to suggest ways not to miss the 2015 deadline. Sperling recalled that most of the countries that took the vow in Dakar had made a similar promise in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 to achieve universal education within a decade – and came nowhere near redeeming that pledge.

When the global community reset the bar in Dakar, Sperling said, they understood that a clear financing structure was essential so that “*if a developing country doing everything right, they would not fail for lack of resources.*” With debt relief, poor countries that took certain steps knew they could count on significant assistance from international agencies, but there is no such certainty or reward for countries that have open school to all children, Sperling said.

“*You need to empower the reformers within their country,*” he said. “*When they are pushing these difficult reforms, they need to be able to say to say there is something at the end of the rainbow if you do things right, if you are willing to take on vested interests.*”

Millions of new children enrolled in schools in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania after fees were abolished. But without extra resources, class sizes exploded and quality suffered, Sperling said. He visited a school in Ethiopia with a dynamic principal – and 170 children in a single second grade class. “*I tried to take a picture with my camera, but you could never see the whole class.*”

The World Bank may offer support for three years, but education ministers fear the money will be gone by the time they train new teachers, Sperling said. “*Countries have*

to have a certainty that they are not going to have teachers rioting in the streets in two years because the money got pulled away,” he said.

To provide basic education, *“you’re talking at least about \$10 billion a year. That is not a lot of money for the whole world,”* said Sperling. He added, to applause, in addition to a preemptive policy on weapons of mass destruction, *“we also need to have a preemptive policy for winning hearts and minds.”*

At a recent conference in Doha, Qatar, he heard repeatedly from Islamic educators that *“you only care about our kids’ education to the extent we don’t grow up to hurt or kill your kids.”*

The United States’ *“narrow, reactive focus”* in response to terrorist threats *“is not working,”* said Sperling. *“The right way to do it is through the United States showing our heart, our sense of justice, by asking for universal basic education, working in a cooperative multilateral forum like the Fast Track Initiative, because then we will get the job done.”* Fewer children will wind up in schools that *“might teach them hate.”*

The American people will support this, he said. *“When the American public saw with the CNN cameras the Taliban preventing little Afghani girls from going to school,”* Sperling said, *“they just knew in their heart it was wrong.”*



Five Going on Fifteen

Geeta Rao Gupta told the conference at the outset that this is *“a golden opportunity”* to press forward to achieve universal education and equity for girls and women. But she also reminded the advocates, *“Frankly, we have only 10 more years.”*

“If this window of opportunity is missed, I think it will be very difficult to grab the global community to recommit in quite the same way. It will be impossible to chip away the cynicism that I know is already growing in the work in which we are all involved,” Gupta said. *“There is really no time to waste.”*

The final word at *Missing the Mark* was left to Nancy Birdsall, who noted that girls born at the time of the Dakar conference now are 5 years old, and millions have no school to attend. If the Millennium Development Goals are missed, then in 2015, when these girls are 15 years old, *“some will die of AIDS ... because they did not learn that they should value their own lives and be able to protect themselves,”* she said.

“We only have between now and 2015, a little more than two presidential terms in the U.S.,” said Birdsall. *“What we’ve heard today is we know what to do, we know how to do it.”* She urged colleagues to work on behalf of Senator Clinton’s Education for All Act, and convince Congress to start spending the money already appropriated for the Fast

Track Initiative. Four developing countries with education reform plans already are eligible for funding, and 10 others countries have sensible plans in place and “*are prepared to move.*”

The United States and other donors need to “*take a small risk and put the money on the table because we have an emergency. The light is going out of the eyes of too many of the women and too many of the younger sisters of the 15-to-20 year old girls that you and I who work in developing countries see every day,*” said Birdsall.

“*So, as President Bush has said, no child left behind -- no child left behind anywhere.*”

