

## **Education as the Foundation for Child and Maternal Health**

Education underlies the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. It is necessary for broad-based economic growth, poverty reduction and improved nutrition. It is a condition for gender equity and empowerment. And it is mutually linked with a high return on investment in child survival, maternal health and improved health overall.

### **Education Saves Lives**

The Canadian Global Campaign for Education welcomes Canada's announcement that the upcoming 2010 G8 will tackle the important issues of maternal and child health. The facts on maternal and child health are startling:

- Half a million women lose their lives each year from pregnancy and birth-related causes.
- For every death, another thirty women suffer severe long-term injuries.
- Poor maternal health, inadequate nutrition and limited access to care cause the death of four million newborns who do not survive their first month.<sup>i</sup>

Education is a powerful tool to unlock long-term sustainable improvements in the maternal and child health sector. The 2010 EFA Global Monitoring Report notes that "empowerment through education is one of the strongest antidotes to maternal risk."<sup>ii</sup> There is considerable evidence that completion of primary school is associated with later marriage for girls, later age at first birth (which strongly correlates to healthier birth), and lower lifetime fertility.<sup>iii</sup> A 65-country analysis finds that doubling the proportion of women with a secondary education would reduce average fertility rates from 5.3 to 3.9 children per woman.<sup>iv</sup>

Education has positive impacts on maternal health-seeking behaviour. Half of women with no education in South and West Asia give birth without having received antenatal care, while that is true for only 10% of women with secondary education. Mothers with primary education in Burkina Faso are twice as likely to have a skilled attendant present during birth, and women with secondary schooling are almost four times as likely as women with no education.<sup>v</sup>

Finally, girls' education has a lasting impact on the health of children and families. Educated girls become mothers who are 50% more likely to immunize their children. In Africa, children of mothers who received 5 years of primary education are 40 % more likely to live beyond age 5.<sup>vi</sup> Just one extra year of girls' education can reduce infant mortality by 5 to 10 %.<sup>vii</sup> Improving women's education is the most significant intervention for reducing malnutrition; it even out-performs a simple increase in the availability of food.<sup>viii</sup>

### **Healthy Children are School Ready**

The health and nutritional status of mothers and infants has a profound and irreversible effect on a child's later ability to learn.

The United Nations estimates that rising food prices over the past several years and the international economic crisis have resulted in a jump in the number of malnourished people in the world from 848 million in 2005 to 963 million in 2008. While this in itself is an international humanitarian crisis, it is also an educational crisis since a child's normal cognitive development begins with good maternal and infant nutrition and health.

Brain development within the first three years of life creates a foundation for future performance in education. Yet alarmingly, over 200 million children under 5 years of age are not reaching their developmental potential due to poverty, poor health and nutrition, and lack of stimulation.<sup>x</sup> Around one in three children under age 5 – 178 million in total – suffers severe or moderate stunting, often resulting from undernourishment *in utero*<sup>x</sup>. Evidence from Guatemala finds that such stunting can have the equivalent effect of losing four grades of schooling<sup>xi</sup>. Iodine deficiency, which is associated with a loss of ten to fifteen points on IQ tests, is estimated to affect one-third of all pre-school children<sup>xii</sup>. The 2010 Education for All Global Monitoring Report found that malnourished children “tend to start school later and are at a greater risk of dropping out before completing a full primary school cycle<sup>xiii</sup>.”

### **Girls become Mothers**

The health and education sectors are mutually reinforcing. The EFA Global Monitoring Report notes:

Millions of children enter school having suffered irreparable damage to their learning potential as a result of malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. Poor maternal health and risks during pregnancy and childbirth are important contributory factors. The upshot of public policy failure in the areas of nutrition and maternal and child health care is not just unnecessary human suffering, but also the erosion of benefits associated with investment in education and progress in getting children into school.

The health and nutrition status of children, beginning in the womb, can lock them into a future of underachievement, or it can open the door to a world of possibility. The challenge is to educate girls and boys and to provide health services to mothers and children. We believe these goals are achievable.

### **Recommendation**

The Canadian Global Campaign for Education believes that education must be a strong component of any international strategy seeking to make sustainable improvements in child and maternal health.

**ENDNOTES**

<sup>i</sup> UNESCO. 2010. *EFA Global Monitoring Report: Reaching the Marginalized*. Paris, France, UNESCO. Page 46.

<sup>ii</sup> UNESCO. 2010. *EFA Global Monitoring Report: Reaching the Marginalized*. Paris, France, UNESCO. Page 47.

<sup>iii</sup> Temin, M. and Levine, R. 2009. *Start with a Girl: A New Agenda for Global Health*. Washington, DC, Center for Global Development.

<sup>iv</sup> Plan. 2009. *Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls in 2009. Girls in the Global Economy: Adding it All Up*. Plan International. Page 158.

<sup>v</sup> UNESCO. 2010. *EFA Global Monitoring Report: Reaching the Marginalized*. Paris, France, UNESCO. Page 47.

<sup>vi</sup> Plan. 2009. *Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls in 2009. Girls in the Global Economy: Adding it All Up*. Plan International. Page 158.

<sup>vii</sup> Plan. 2009. *Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls in 2009. Girls in the Global Economy: Adding it All Up*. Plan International. Page 158.

<sup>viii</sup> Smith, L.C. and Haddad, L.J. 2000. "Explaining Child Malnutrition in Developing Countries." International Food Policy Research Institute Research Report No.111. Washington DC: International Food Policy Research Institute.

<sup>ix</sup> Grantham-McGregor, S., Bun Cheung, Y., Cueto, S., Glewwe, P., Richer, L., Trupp, B. and the international Child Development Steering Group. 2007. Developmental Potential in the first 5 years for children in developing countries. *The Lancet*, 369, pp. 60-70.

<sup>x</sup> UNESCO. 2010. *EFA Global Monitoring Report: Reaching the Marginalized*. Paris, France, UNESCO. Page 44.

<sup>xi</sup> Behram, J.R., Hoodinot, J., Malussio, J.A., Soler-Hampejsek, E., Behrman, E.R., Martorell, R., Ramirez-Zea, M. and Stein, A.D. 2008. *What Determines Adult Cognitive Skills: Impacts of Pre-Schooling, Schooling and Post-schooling Experiences in Guatemala*. Washington, DC, International Food Policy Research Institute. Cited in UNESCO. 2010. *EFA Global Monitoring Report: Reaching the Marginalized*. Paris, France, UNESCO. Page 43.

<sup>xii</sup> UNESCO. 2010. *EFA Global Monitoring Report: Reaching the Marginalized*. Paris, France, UNESCO. Page 44.

<sup>xiii</sup> UNESCO. 2010. *EFA Global Monitoring Report: Reaching the Marginalized*. Paris, France, UNESCO. Page 43.