



## CARE'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE MDGs

Building on success to accelerate progress towards 2015  
MDG Summit, 20-22 September 2010

### **MDG Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women**

Target 1: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education,  
preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015

#### **Overview**

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are at the heart of the Millennium Development Goals and are preconditions for overcoming poverty, hunger and disease. The good news is that many parts of the developing world have seen progress on eliminating gender disparity in education – a key pathway to empowerment. Such progress has been most evident at the primary school level where over the past decade, the gender gap in primary school enrollment has narrowed globally.<sup>i</sup> However, gender parity in primary and secondary education – a target that was to be met by 2005 – is still out of reach for many developing regions.<sup>ii</sup> Gender gaps in enrollment, completion and achievement rates are particularly pronounced at higher levels of education, with only one in five girls enrolled in secondary school in Africa.<sup>iii</sup> In many countries, such disparities are magnified by poverty, marginalization and exposure to risks such as food insecurity, armed conflict and HIV/AIDS. Girls from poor, isolated or socially excluded groups face additional layers of disadvantage and vulnerability. Social norms and cultural practices that attach less value to girls and women pose significant barriers to the achievement of this MDG goal.

#### **How Do We Achieve Success?**

The empowerment of women and girls is central to achieving gender equality. Education is a cornerstone of women's and girls' empowerment and a doorway to realizing their rights. However, education alone is not enough. CARE's experience indicates that empowering women and girls requires a holistic approach that addresses all barriers to women's and girls' rights at various points in their lives. Such an approach includes, but must go beyond, efforts to provide women and girls with skills, information and resources. It must also involve efforts aimed at altering the relationships and institutions that surround women and girls and shape their choices and ability to make decisions. This includes efforts to address discriminatory practices such as early marriage, gender-based violence and other injustices that impede the education, health and welfare of women and girls and limit the opportunities and resources available to them.

To achieve greater progress on MDG 3, CARE recommends that policy makers:

- **Base policies on a comprehensive interpretation of women's empowerment.** This includes support for programs aimed at helping women and men uncover, challenge and change traditions, policies, norms and attitudes that limit the lives of women and men during childhood, adolescence, child bearing and the rest of their lives.
- **Make long-term commitments to empower women and girls.** Addressing deep-rooted issues of inequality, marginalization and discrimination is a long term process



that involves social and structural change from the bottom up. Governments and donors must be willing to support and sustain programs aimed at empowering women and girls over a long-term time frame and support flexibility, learning and innovation within such efforts.

- **Create supportive laws and policies, and ensure their effective implementation.** Explicit laws and policies aimed at promoting women's and girls' rights are only meaningful if they are effectively implemented and enforced. Implementation requires mechanisms for accountability, including support for civil society engagement and advocacy to hold governments accountable, mobilize communities, and build coalitions to champion women's and girls' rights.
- **Engage men and boys.** Women's empowerment is not solely about them, nor can it be achieved by only engaging them. The engagement of men and boys is critical to achieving positive changes in the relationships and structures that shape the lives of women and girls as well as those of men and boys.
- **Incorporate gender analysis and women's empowerment objectives in programming.** Governments, development agencies and civil society actors should conduct gender analyses as part of all programming with the goal of identifying and address gender inequities and barriers. Key efforts include collection of gender disaggregated data and integrating women's needs and perspectives into program design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- **Support social networks and safe spaces for women and girls.** Providing women and girls with a space to build legitimacy and support is an important step in reducing their isolation, and encouraging their participation, collective action and empowerment. Such spaces may include savings and loans groups for women and social networks and clubs for girls.

### What Do We Know Works?

#### **Case study (CARE India): Udaan Accelerated Learning Camps, Uttar Pradesh, India**

In many parts of India, girls' education is undermined by factors such as poverty, customary beliefs and attitudes devaluing girls and a limited number of schools in remote areas. In response, CARE India has created and implemented strategies aimed at providing access to education to some of the hardest to reach children, including girls. CARE has piloted and refined a residential education camp model called *Udaan* (to soar), designed to help girls aged 10-14 who are at extreme social and economic risk and who have missed out on an education. *Udaan* has been running successfully in Uttar Pradesh for about 10 years and is part of a CARE India education portfolio that reaches over 70,000 marginalized girls.

Each annual *Udaan* camp session educates approximately 100 girls, who live on a residential campus together in a tight-knit community setting, along with their instructors. The accelerated courses allow girls who never attended school, or dropped out early, to complete their basic primary education in 11 months, and transition to formal schooling in upper primary and secondary school. The program involves activities such as:

- Instruction involving relevant curriculum, including a Social Learning Package aimed at sharpening girls' critical thinking skills and supporting their social development;
- Participation of girls in school governance and extra-curricular activities such as sports and drama to increase self-confidence and leadership skills; and
- Preparation of participants to take the required examination to enter secondary school. It also supports girls in the secondary school admissions process, and provides counseling and support for those encountering difficulties upon entering traditional secondary schools.

CARE has partnered with the Government of India to implement and scale up a similar approach in government schools known as *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalyay* (KGBV), which

serve isolated and minority communities with low female literacy rates and large gender gaps in education. The KGBV model relies on a high degree of community engagement, sensitizes teachers to gender issues facing students, and provides such needs-based incentives as escorts, uniforms, and supplies. KGBV schools also implement the Social Learning Package, described above, and treat girls' personal social development as a crucial element of their education. Some KGBV schools are also reaching out to primary schools to reduce the number of students dropping out and tackle the gender gap in primary education early on. CARE India provides a range of onsite academic support, community mobilization, and systems support to 76 KGBV schools in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Gujarat, reaching approximately 38,000 students.

**Outcomes and Impacts:** *Udaan* and KGBV have had success in promoting girls' school enrollment and completion. In June 2009, the *Udaan* camp graduated its tenth cohort. Of the 102 girls graduating in 2009, 101 passed their board exams, 32 with outstanding performance in the top division. Many *Udaan* graduates have made a successful transition to secondary schools.

*Udaan* has also been a proving ground for learner-centered curricular innovations that CARE is now helping to introduce on a much broader scale in national education initiatives such as KGBV. Students at the KGBV schools that CARE India supports in Uttar Pradesh have achieved substantial gains in both language and math during the past three years, compared to baseline educational data taken at the outset of the program. Such improvements in learning have opened the door to further education that was previously out of reach for many marginalized girls.

Beyond academics, Indian girls from marginalized communities need much more support to successfully complete a secondary education and mature into empowered women. Girls in the *Udaan* camps and KGBV schools are taught to think critically, to develop reflective cognitive and communications abilities, and to perceive and act on opportunities to influence their own social and economic positions. CARE studies have shown that participating girls demonstrate increased self-confidence, improved decision-making and organization and improved critical thinking and communication skills. Girls are able to reframe their self-perceptions and see themselves as empowered individuals who can make affirmative life choices. Additionally, many *Udaan* graduates have been able to delay marriage by several years, further increasing the likelihood that they will go on to greater educational, personal and economic opportunities.

**Key Factors for Success, Scale Up, and Replication:** The experience of CARE in India demonstrates the promise of a holistic approach to girls' education, centered around efforts to ensure girls' access to relevant knowledge and skills as well as providing them with social networks, safe spaces and leadership opportunities. Also crucial to the approach is the promotion of girls' rights, including efforts to explore and improve community norms and structures, engage communities in support of girls' rights, and advocate for the adoption of similar approaches through national government programs and initiatives.

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Founded in 1945, CARE is a leading aid organization fighting global poverty. In nearly 70 countries, CARE works with the poorest communities to improve basic health and education, enhance rural livelihoods and food security, increase access to clean water and sanitation, expand economic opportunity, and help vulnerable people adapt to climate change. Women are at the heart of CARE's efforts, because experience shows that a woman's achievements yield dramatic benefits for her entire family. CARE also provides lifesaving assistance during emergencies, and helps rebuild communities after the disaster has passed.

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<sup>i</sup> There were 95 girls of primary school age in school for every 100 boys in developing countries in 2007, compared to 91 in 1999. See UNESCO, Education For all: Global Monitoring Report 2010.

<sup>ii</sup> Gaps in gender parity are most pronounced in parts of South and West Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania. See Millennium Development Goals Report 2010.

<sup>iii</sup> UNESCO, Education all: Global Monitoring Report 2007.