

Education for all



Background Briefs
Development issues and efforts

We often take things that are a part of everyday life for granted. For example, young people in the developed world who “have” to go to school seldom think that they are privileged. Yet in the developing world even basic education is unavailable to most. Imagine if you could not read, write or do basic math. Imagine how limited your options in life would be if you could not even sign your name, read direction signs or count money. Imagine what Canada would be like if very few people could read and write.

Education is a human right. It is essential in order for people and societies to develop to their full potential. Yet, in countries such as Mali, only about one-third of all young children attend school, and the figure is even lower for girls. Only a small number of the children going to school complete five years of education, which does not allow them to acquire

basic literacy skills.

Although there has been a marked increase in enrollment rates in primary schools, especially among girls, more than 100 million children worldwide do not go to school. While adult literacy has improved, about 770 million people, more than half of them women, still cannot read or write. Of those who do attend school, many leave without basic skills because of under-funded education systems and poor quality instruction. Barriers to attending and completing school are higher for girls, members of ethnic minorities, children living in geographic isolation, working children, children affected by conflict and disasters, children living with disabilities and the very poor.

Education is the single best

investment a country can make. It contributes to better health, higher incomes and increased participation in community life. The gains are particularly high when girls are educated.

The world community has been committed to achieving primary education for all young children since 1990. Canada, a world leader in child-centred, girl-friendly education, has identified basic education as a priority. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) supports initiatives that improve the quality, safety and relevance of basic education. It supports projects that close the gender gap in education and provide education to prevent HIV/AIDS. Other CIDA funded projects provide education for girls and boys in conflict, post-conflict or other emergency situations.

During the rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan, CIDA funded the “hidden schools” that continued to educate girls, although the teachers and families faced severe penalties if they were caught.

Now, CIDA and CARE Canada – a humanitarian organization fighting poverty around the world – are implementing primary education in over 100 public schools in Afghanistan, as well as providing courses for teachers, school supplies and construction of classrooms.

Among other projects, CIDA funds a training centre for youths in Rwanda. The goal of the project is to reduce poverty by enabling the social and economic reintegration of young Rwandans who were unable to complete their basic schooling because of the lengthy civil war.

In Bangladesh, a CIDA funded project provides education to the poorest of the poor, especially girls. Two million children have enrolled in school and the completion rate is 90%. Today, the project operates 34 000 schools which 1.1 million children attend.