

# **Educate Girls: The 2003 World Food Prize Laureate**

## **Lecture**

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If someone told you that, with just 12 years of investment of about \$1 billion a year, you could, across the developing world, increase economic growth, decrease infant mortality, increase agricultural yields, improve maternal health, improve children's health and nutrition, increase the numbers of children — girls and boys — in school, slow down population growth, increase the number of men and women who can read and write, decrease the spread of AIDS, add new people to the work force and be able to improve their wages without pushing others out of the work force — what would you say? Such a deal! What is it? How can I sign up?

The answer is to educate girls. United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan says we know from study after study that there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls and women. Let me share some of the reasons why.

There was a study done by T. Paul Schultz at Yale who said, "Increased schooling of mothers is associated with larger improvements in child quality incomes than increase in the education of the father. It has a larger beneficial impact on the child's health, on the child's schooling, and on the child's future adult productivity." Now, this is similar to what the World Food Programme found out when we said we're going to end hunger; therefore we need to get food to women because they're the cooks.

Children in the developing world spend almost all of their time with their mother, so why doesn't it make more sense that the adult that they spend the most time with is going to have the most impact on them? If that person is educated, it does have a lot of impact on the children.

For instance, in the areas of health, the International Center for Research on Women says that if you educate a girl for six years or more, it will always have a positive effect on a woman's use of prenatal care, postnatal care and the use of experts in delivery.

UNICEF tells us that educated mothers immunize their children 50% more than mothers who are not educated. UNESCO tells us that just a primary school education can decrease child mortality by 5-10%.

The same professor at Yale tells us that the heights and weights of newborns are improved almost across the board for women who have at least a basic education compared to those who do not.

And the World Bank did a study in African countries which says that five years of schooling of girls means a 40% higher survival rate for their children than girls who have babies who have not had that education.

The UN Population Agency tells us that uneducated women are less likely to know that condom use prevents the spread of HIV/AIDS, although they're quick to point out that not everybody who is educated knows that either.

And a Zambian study says that AIDS spreads twice as fast among uneducated girls than among girls that have even some schooling.

On population, UNESCO will tell us that if a girl is educated for at least seven years, she has two or three less children than her sister who is uneducated. Educated girls generally start having babies later than uneducated girls. If they marry later, even in their late teens, young women are more likely to marry someone closer to their own age than a young girl marrying somebody much older who perhaps has had a lot more experiences than she has and is more likely to bring AIDS into the family. Educated girls know about baby spacing and have their children in less frequent intervals, usually, than those who are uneducated.

The World Bank did a paper where they studied women in one hundred different countries, and they estimated that for every four years of education, future fertility drops by about one birth per mother.

Looking at the economy, what does girls' education mean? Again, in the World Bank study of one hundred countries, they wrote about women in secondary education, and the study said in the one hundred countries in which they studied, for every 1% increase in girls who have gone to secondary education, there is an annual per capita income growth of .3%.

And, of course, it is well known that countries who have organized their education systems so that there is relative equality between girls and boys in access to education, have grown faster economically in the last few decades than most countries that have not.

IFPRI, the former home of Per Pinstrup-Andersen, a World Food Prize Laureate, did studies about women in agriculture. And you know that when we talk about agriculture, we're often talking about women working in agriculture. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, 90% of the people working in processing food crops and providing water and fuel are women.

IFPRI tells us that better-educated farmers are more likely to adopt new technologies and to have access to extension workers. They write about a study in Kenya where they looked at increased education of women and saw that those women were able to plant coffee trees more readily and more productively. And then they follow the phenomenon that other women farmers, even if they weren't so well-educated, followed the women that were. And IFPRI said that women farmers are more likely to follow the practices of other women farmers than they are the practices of men. So IFPRI made the point, therefore, that underinvesting in women has high opportunity costs, especially when the vast majority of farmers are women.

And when we look at nutrition, we can look at another study done by IFPRI in 63 countries. More productive farming, due to an increase in women's education, was directly related to a 43% decline in malnutrition between the years 1970 and 1995.

And then there was an interesting study that the World Bank reported on in its World Development Report, which said in Guatemala you need 15 times as much spending to impact improved child nutrition when income is earned by the father rather than the mother. In other words, when the mother gets her income, she more likely uses it for the benefit of the family immediately, particularly in this case, for nutritional needs.

Another World Food Prize Laureate, Mohammed Yunus tells a similar story. When he was starting the Grameen Bank, he was asking potential customers of his bank to list the top ten things they were going to do with their new income after they got a loan and invested it in a business and then had more income for their family. He said on the lists of ten things that were made by potential male borrowers maybe somewhere at the bottom of the list was something for their families. And if you ask women the same question, when they listed the ten things they were going to use their new income for, maybe somewhere on the bottom of the list was something they were going to do for themselves, because everything else was something they were going to do for their families.

We saw this at World Food Programme over and over again. Women in every region of the world have said to me, "Please send food into my family, because if food comes into my house, I manage it. I'm in charge of the food. But when cash comes into my house, I don't. I'm not in charge of the cash, and it doesn't necessarily go for food." That doesn't mean there shouldn't be cash in the house, but it means if our mission at WFP was to end hunger, we had to direct food to women in an effort to try to achieve that.

I'll give you an example. One time I was in Latin America, and I saw a program where an NGO had given a cow to a family. And we talked to the woman who took care of that cow. She milked it every morning, she brought it with her to the fields where she worked in the fields all day while her toddler children were running around in the fields. She brought that cow back at night and milked it again. Each time after she milked it, she brought the milk down to the co-op, as the other women milking their cows had done. And she did this work day after day after day. And then of course she prepared the food

for the family, took care of the children at home, and so forth. Once a month it was time to go to the co-op to collect the money from the milk. Guess who did that? Her husband. He owned the cow.

We have to remember not only to keep women in the picture, but to do our best to educate them. When we were working with WFP we saw the importance of educating children. This audience understands this concept more than almost any other audience. There are people here today that are feeding children in the United States, feeding children throughout the world, and you know that if a child has a meal at school, then that child can learn more. They are less tardy, they are less absent and they do better in tests. We know all of this from schools in the U.S. It's the same for schools all around the world.

Children are the same. They need food to be able to grow and to be able to develop. It's the same issue everywhere. And that's why WFP for all of its years of existence has been feeding children in school. It had a boost to that effort when Ambassador, former Senator George McGovern and Senator Bob Dole asked for additional resources for feeding children at school to help support WFP and NGOs and others who were reaching out to try to reach children to feed them in school.

Universal education for all children is a part of the Education for All initiatives of the United Nations, a program that we are all striving to try to achieve. There are goals set to try to ensure that all children have at least basic primary education by the year 2005 and secondary education by 2015.

We found at WFP that as we were working on feeding children at school, we could also use food as an incentive to get girls to school. There are some wonderful programs in WFP, highlighted in areas where there are very few girls going to school, where girls get take-home rations. If a girl comes to school for a month, for instance, she gets to take home a liter can of vegetable oil. That liter can of vegetable oil sometimes is worth half her father's monthly salary. It's an incentive for him to send her to school.

WFP does this in many different countries around the world, and the lowest increase in attendance where they've implemented it is a 50% increase. In Pakistan, in one community there was a 247% increase in the number of girls in school because of this incentive program.

When I visited a refugee camp in Iran where there were Afghan refugees, WFP had started this program because mostly the schools were filled with boys. The Iranians were kindly hosting all the refugees and providing schools and basic support services for the refugees. But they were complaining to me, happily, that they were going to have to build a new school, because since we had started this program, there was such a great demand on the part of the girls who wanted to come to school, that the children could not all fit in the existing school.

Some societies still want segregated education, girls and boys, but there's one schoolhouse, so maybe building another schoolhouse, as the Iranians were doing for the refugees, would make all the difference for more girls to come to school.

And maybe incentive programs – we know incentive programs like the World Food Programme offers - would make a difference for girls to go to school. There's been a lot of progress. There are 65 countries that have made a lot of progress on getting girls educated throughout their countries, but there are still many more to go.

The Secretary General spoke about how important it is for him, when he established a program for educating girls throughout the world. He said, "No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity, lower infant and maternal mortality, improve nutrition, promote health, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS, and increasing the chances of education for the next generation. Let us invest in women and girls."

As I did my work at WFP, I felt like there was nothing more important than to educate girls, because educated mothers can take more opportunities in the workplace. They do have more opportunities because they can read and write, because they can take advantage of economic opportunities that come their way, and improve the economic well-being of their families, their communities and their countries; because educated girls know more about taking care of their health and that of their children and of the right kind of nutrition for themselves and their children; and because those girls that are educated make their own decisions that are sometimes, often different, from their uneducated sisters, about the size of their families and how to take care of those families when they have them; because educated girls who grow up to be educated women can be more productive in agriculture and more productive in their own communities as well.

That's why, when Ambassador Quinn called and told me that I would win the World Food Prize (by the way, I was speechless on the phone when he called), and Tom and I talked about what would be the best thing to do with the prize, and we thought that I didn't earn this prize because of my great scientific research or of my brilliant intellectual abilities. I was given the prize because I led the World Food Programme and because we accomplished a lot of great things. So to us it made sense that the generous prize money should be donated for the same purpose.

So I have contacted the Friends of the World Food Programme, which is the charitable organization in the U.S. which supports the World Food Programme, and told them that I would like to give the \$250,000 award to the Friends of the World Food Programme and ask them to set up a trust for the specific purpose of supporting programs for education of girls and literacy for women.

I believe it is the best payoff possible in the world to contribute to this important agenda, to educate girls and provide literacy training for women; because there is no other policy where such a limited amount of resources can have such a maximum impact on poverty and hunger throughout the world.

I believe if we want to change the world, and we all do, there is one way to do that – educate girls