

Education, Health and Human Development

It is truly an honor and a pleasure to be here today. I've been given the daunting task of talking about health, education, and human development within the context of children around the world—in ten minutes!

With three "topics" to cover, I know I could address each as a separate element. But the three are so tightly connected that in my talk, as in programs that tackle these issues effectively, they need to be addressed as a whole.

Education is a child's right, enshrined in the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Yet one in five children around the world—120 to 125 million children worldwide—are not enrolled in primary school. What can keep a child from school? Many things play a role. Even where schools exist, too often teachers fail to show up for class; books and learning materials are scarce; classes are crowded; schools are unsafe; and communities have little say in what schools teach.¹ In addition, in many countries where schools are nominally free, "user fees" and other costs, such as those for books and uniforms, are higher than families can afford. For millions of children, the choice appears to be: work and eat, or study and starve.

Ultimately, even the best efforts to educate children will fail if these young people are too hungry, too sick, too poor, and too desperate to learn. Despite tremendous strides in child survival, over ten million children under the age of five continue to die each year in developing countries. The majority of child deaths in the developing world are easily preventable and due to just five maladies: pneumonia, diarrhea, malaria, malnutrition, and measles.² Further, it is estimated that in very poor countries, children may be ill for 30 to 50 percent of their young lives.³ Health is defined generally as freedom from physical disease or pain. Yet truly healthy children are not just children free of illness. They are also free of hunger, poverty, exhaustion, stress, and overwhelming responsibilities.

Incorporating a focus on human development is critical to creating education programs that truly meet the needs of children and their communities. Programs that integrate basic education with the teaching of life skills have the best chance at giving children the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. When I talk about "life skills" I'm talking about instruction in basic areas that can have an extraordinary impact on children's daily lives—things like reproductive health and personal hygiene; relevant vocational skills;

¹ Global Campaign for Education, "A Quality Education for All: Priority Actions for Governments, Donors, and Civil Society," briefing paper, May 2002, <http://www.campaignforeducation.org/_html/2002-docs/05-quality_en/frameset.shtml> (June 21, 2002).

² U.S. Coalition for Child Survival, "Facts about Child Survival," <<http://www.child-survival.org/factsheet.html>>.

³ Rehydration Project, "Children Facts—Children at Risk," March 21, 2002, <http://rehydrate.org/facts/children_at_risk.htm>.

and how to access resources that might help provide food, clothing, shelter, health care, and safety. The well child is one with an improved quality of life due to enhanced physical health, adequate emotional and economic support, access to educational resources, and environmentally sound surroundings. Such a holistic view recognizes the direct linkage between health, educational achievement, quality of life, and economic productivity.⁴

In my opinion there are basically four types of educational systems in place in developing countries. The first type of system is formal schools run by the government. These schools offer a critical educational opportunity to some students, but they are failing to meet the needs of many others around the world; in fact, they are crumbling. The formal system presents prospective students with obstacles such as prohibitive fees, inconvenient locations, rigid schedules and curriculums, and a failure to address issues of health and development. Education through such a system is not a reality for many marginalized groups of children such as girls, street children, children who work, and children in rural areas.

In the second system, non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, support the formal, government-run schools in a variety of ways. Increasing debt in many developing countries has caused governments to make severe cutbacks, and social programs such as education and health are often the first to be reduced. The Campaign for Female Education (CamFed), a grantee partner of the Global Fund for Children, has stepped in to help girl students in their final two years of primary school in Ghana. CamFed students receive two school uniforms and a pair of shoes, as well as books and stationery. CamFed, drawing on research showing that social support plays a role in keeping girls in school, makes a point of visiting the girls regularly and encouraging them to stay in school. The cost of this program is minimal. Just \$66 funds each girl for two years. For the sixty girls in the program, this is less than \$4000 a year. Other organizations around the world have a similar mission. For example, the Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation provides scholarships to girls in Nepal while Room to Read, another grantee partner of the Global Fund for Children, provides scholarships for girls in Nepal, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

In the third system, NGOs operate or support nonformal schools. These schools are often located closer to the children they teach, enjoy a high degree of community support and involvement, focus on teaching life-skills and addressing the day-to-day issues children face, offer flexible schedules and curriculums to address the realities of these children's lives, and are generally more cost-effective than formal institutions. Successful nonformal education includes a focus on bringing school to the students and on structuring a schedule and a curriculum that teaches life skills as well as academics. The Ruchika Social Service Organisation, a grantee partner of the Global Fund for Children, operates railway-platform schools in India. Ruchika works to bring school to students who have not been attending regular public school. In the platform schools children not only learn how to read and write, using textbooks Ruchika produced, but they also learn a

⁴ World Health Organization (WHO), "WHO's Global School Health Initiative: Helping Schools to Become 'Health-Promoting Schools,'" Fact Sheet No. 92, June 1998.

range of other skills from basic hygiene to human rights awareness. Ruchika operates more than a dozen railway-platform schools with an annual budget of just \$7,000, and its success has inspired other educators to start schools at railway stations in other parts of India.

In the fourth system, governments are supporting nonformal education programs in a variety of ways. In some countries the government provides modest support for nonformal schools by providing land, supplies, teachers, or money for teachers' salaries. In others, governments are adopting successful nonformal programs and scaling them to become part of their formal systems. Just last month the government of Ethiopia took a pioneering step by adopting the nonformal education program developed in that country by the Save the Children Alliance. The newly adopted Alternative Route to Basic Education is designed to give children access to nonformal education through the formal education system. The program is designed to be "flexible, cost-effective, and learner-centered but also related to the daily life of the children." By linking the formal and nonformal systems the government hopes to provide education to those the formal system has failed to reach, such as children in remote rural areas, street children, and children with disabilities.⁵

Lessons Learned

Educators, NGOs, and other civil-society groups—including those I've mentioned here today—are coming together in increasing numbers by joining the Global Campaign for Education. The Campaign is a growing international network that calls for more and better education; the elimination of obstacles such as school fees; more training for teachers; and more money to pay for these and many other improvements in the quantity and quality of schooling available in developing nations.⁶ For improvements in education systems to be successful, these systems must also look beyond the three Rs to address holistically the health and well-being of the children they are striving to teach. No single group—governmental or NGO—can do it alone. The number of groups tackling this challenge around the world is immense and together they have the potential to transform the lives of the world's children.

Through our work at the Global Fund for Children we have worked closely with a tiny portion of this vast network. In keeping with my limited time, I have boiled volumes of knowledge from our experience down into four basic lessons learned.

No education system can succeed without attending to the health and well-being of its students. Children cannot get to school, nor learn when they are there, if they are sick, exhausted, and hungry. Our grassroots partners have witnessed firsthand the impact of childhood morbidity and mortality on community progress and the ways in which illness thwarts children's ability to thrive, learn, and take advantage of life opportunities. These programs are calling increasingly for additional resources to address not only the

⁵allAfrica.com, "Government Adopts Non-Formal Education Program," May 9, 2003, <<http://allafrica.com/stories/200305090700.html>>; allAfrica.com, "Experience Sharing to Achieve Educational Goals," May 2, 2003, <<http://allafrica.com/stories/200305020192.html>>.

⁶ Global Campaign for Education, "A Quality Education for All."

education and welfare needs of their young charges, but their health needs as well. Such an integrated and holistic approach holds great promise for securing a brighter future for at-risk children around the world. Based on what we have learned from our grantee partners, GFC now provides an annual health and well-being grant of \$1,000 to each of our grantees to address the most pressing health needs of the children each organization serves. While the uses of these grants have been varied, some representative innovations include:

- Distributing hygiene packets containing soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, detergent, hair oil, and undergarments (Nishtha, India)
- Providing hepatitis A and B vaccinations, iron supplements, and oral rehydration supplements (NEED, India)
- Hiring a counselor for sexually abused children (JUCONI, Mexico)

Effective nonformal education programs have several elements in common. Many nonformal education programs have identified the need for a holistic approach to children's education, health, and well-being, and they recognize that they are well-positioned to meet these multiple needs. Successful nonformal schools tend to focus on educating girls and other groups without equal access to education, such as working students, street children, and those from rural areas. They often adapt to the needs of their students by being flexible and creative in their schedules, locations, and curriculums. Without large capital expenses, they are generally much more cost-effective than formal schools. They emphasize appropriate training for teachers, and they often increase both the influence and the accountability of their teachers by recruiting them from within the communities where they will teach. A strong level of community involvement and ownership is critical to the success of nonformal schools, as is the establishment of a working partnership with the government and other relevant groups or institutions. Unfortunately, most nonformal schools around the world also have in common a lack of connection to funding sources, philanthropic networks, and other means of support.⁷

We cannot ignore the educational, health, and developmental needs of boys. At-risk boys and young men in many countries, especially developing countries, are in crisis, a fact that has very real current and future ramifications for economic advancement, global security, and social progress. An increased awareness of the educational needs of girls around the world has resulted in significant efforts in this area, and a focus on the needs of boys should in no way detract from these advances. However, much less attention has been focused on the world's one hundred million boys who are deprived of educational opportunities. At the very least, these boys and young men, trapped by dire circumstances, become disillusioned, hopeless, and angry, making them vulnerable to negative forces such as extremism, sexism, and intolerance. In the worst cases, these young men turn their frustrations and despair violently outward. With few life choices and nothing to lose, this pool of males provides an endless supply of foot soldiers for the world's local, national, and international conflicts. Although a variety of strategies must be employed to help these boys, improving their educational opportunities needs to be a

⁷YesPakistan.com, "What Leads to Success in Non-Formal Education?," June 17, 2002, <http://www.yespakistan.com/education/s_non_formal_sch.asp>.

key component. These educational opportunities must include not only academic training but also life skills training and the promotion of tolerance and inclusion.

Education organizations around the world need a commitment of long-term

support. While the task of providing the services I've been talking about may seem daunting, there are a number of small, indigenous organizations that have found creative and successful ways of bringing them to their communities. Most often these groups recognize the ties between education, health, and human development, and they seek to meet a variety of needs simultaneously. These groups are generally underfunded, underappreciated, and lack access to philanthropic circles. But they have the tools and the capacity to truly transform children's lives. Such transformations don't happen overnight. These organizations need stable, long-term partnerships and support to continue their work and to build their own organizational capacity. Without the resources to continually build on their successes, learn from their challenges, and provide the continuity children need, the potential of these innovative groups is wasted, along with that of so many of the children they seek to teach.

Conclusion

Quality education should not be a privilege reserved only for children living in developed countries. Not only is education every child's right, it is also one of the keys to creating a healthier, more caring, and more productive global society. A high-quality, holistic education can transform children's lives. It can give children who start with little or nothing the skills, opportunity, and hope to fulfill their potential. In a village in southeastern India, fifteen-year-old Mina Naskar has felt first-hand the difference getting an education in both academics and life skills can make. She says, "Before my life was like that of a caged bird that always fidgets in the cage thinking about getting out and flying." Now Mina participates in the programs of Nishtha. In addition to studying, Mina and her peers contribute to their community by repairing roads and other public structures and by using what they have learned in school to counsel families about the dangers of early marriages and pregnancies for young girls, intervene in situations of spousal or child abuse, and encourage their fathers to exercise proper sanitation habits. Nishtha has helped Mina and the other girls and women of her village earn a stronger voice in the daily workings of their community and to achieve a self-confidence that will continue to serve them well in the future.

Nishtha is just one example of a program making a difference in the life of one girl and her entire community. There are many, many programs doing the same thing around the world. Representatives of three such programs, Children's Town in Zambia and Prerena and Ruchika in India are here today. I encourage you to seek them out and listen to their stories. Representatives from Children's Town and Prerena will be speaking at this afternoon's session on "Investing in Children."

Thank you for listening to me today.