

THE DANGERS OF NEGLECTING EDUCATION FOR BOYS

Approximately three hundred million children lack access to education around the world; two-thirds of them are girls.¹ The short- and long-term impacts of such neglect are well-documented and include increased birth rates; poorer maternal and child health outcomes; decreased employment rates and earnings, which lead to higher levels of poverty; and lesser engagement in civic affairs.² 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. Recognizing the social, economic, and even security implications of neglecting such a combustible population, the Global Fund for Children (GFC) is supporting a number of grassroots organizations around the world confronting the special challenges of at-risk boys.

Population and Security: The Impact of High Male Sex Ratios

The relationship between population and security has been highlighted by some national-security experts since the 1960s, leading to recommendations for population control as a strategy to stabilize societies.³ More recently, scholars have raised concerns that a surplus of young adult males in a society is correlated with instability and violence. Analysis shows that when the proportion of young men aged fifteen to twenty-nine in the population rises to a high level, there is too much competition for mates, jobs, and recognition, creating conditions for strife, coalitional aggression, and instability.⁴

These demographic dynamics are in play in a number of trouble spots around the world. Because of traditional cultural norms favoring males, the populations of at least seven large Asian countries—India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Nepal, and Taiwan—show high ratios of males to females. Normal birth sex ratios range between 105 and 107 male per 100 female births. Yet the ratio in these nations is severely imbalanced. For example, in Punjab, India, the sex ratio of children zero to six years of age is now 126 males per 100 females.⁵ China's stringent family-planning policy has led to widespread sex-selective abortions. As a result, China's 2000 census showed about 117 male births for every 100 female births. The imbalance in some regions is as high as 135 males born for every 100 females.⁶ In Africa, where approximately 55 percent of those infected with HIV are women and the number of female cases

¹ Center for Development and Evaluation, U.S. Agency for International Development, "Cross-Cutting Themes: Gender," (Chapter 8), FY 2000 Performance Overview, April 3, 2001.

² Office of Women in Development, U.S. Agency for International Development, "Girls' Education: Good for Boys, Good for Development," Information Bulletin No. 5, October 1999.

³ Don Collins, "Overabundance of Rogue Males: A major contributing factor in terrorism," *Social Contract*, Fall 2001.

⁴ Don Collins.

⁵ Valerie Hudson and Andrea Den Boer, "The Security Logic of High Sex Ratio Societies"; referred to in Donald A. Collins's draft article, "A India/Pakistani War Could Come from Unbalanced Population Growth," for possible publication in *Social Contract*. Draft article shared via electronic correspondence on February 3, 2002.

⁶ "Men without Women: The Consequences of Family Planning," *Economist*, June 22, 2002.

continues to increase, the AIDS epidemic's assault on women is setting the stage for a similarly skewed sex ratio across Africa.⁷

Scholars and policy makers playing out the worst-case scenarios from this gender imbalance posit some disquieting consequences. Valerie Hudson of Brigham Young University notes that the thirty million unhappy, unmarried men China is likely to have by 2020 "could become 'kindling for forces of political revolution at home.'" In addition, the Chinese government "may decide to use the surplus men as a weapon for military adventurism and 'actively desire to see them give their lives in pursuit of a national interest.'"⁸ Stephen Lewis, U.N. special envoy on HIV/AIDS in Africa, predicted in July 2002 that by around 2010, Africa's AIDS crisis will decimate the female population leading to a seismic demographic rupture. Lewis notes, "we're going to have all kinds of men without partners, wandering the landscape on a continent where there is already substantial instability."⁹

The Dangerous Lives of Impoverished Boys

Just as critical as understanding the future impact of surplus men on societies is recognizing the dangers faced and posed by the most neglected and impoverished boys. Boys in many developing countries are buffeted by family disintegration, war, natural disasters, AIDS, and violence and are at special risk for prostitution, drug and alcohol abuse, criminal activity (as victims and as perpetrators), poor health, malnutrition, illiteracy, exploitation, and premature death.¹⁰

According to some estimates, boys are the majority of the estimated one hundred million children who live at least part-time on the streets. Most of these children are found in developing countries, with forty million in Latin America, twenty-five to thirty million in Asia, and ten million in Africa.¹¹ The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that globally there are 250 million children between the ages of five and fourteen working in some type of economic activity. As is the case for street children, data show that there are more boys than girls among economically active children. This is especially true in Latin America, where 70 percent of the working children are reported to be male.¹²

Such life circumstances have made these boys prime fodder for violent activities and risks to their communities. An estimated 300,000 children younger than eighteen years of age take part in hostilities around the world, with more than 120,000 of these child soldiers involved in conflicts across the African continent.¹³ The majority of these child soldiers are boys who are

⁷ David Brown, "Study: AIDS Shortening Life in 51 Nations," *Washington Post*, July 8, 2002.

⁸ "Men Without Women."

⁹ David Brown.

¹⁰ KIT, "Street Children—Overview," October 2001, <http://www.kit.nl/specials/html/sc_street_children.asp>, also Save the Children Canada, "Street Children," <<http://www.savethechildren.ca/en/whatwedo/isfstrch.html>> (February 2002).

¹¹ StreetKids.net, "Street Children Statistics," February 2002, <<http://www.streetkids.net/info/>>; also KIT.

¹² Hans-Rimbert Hemmer, Thomas Steger, and Rainer Wilhelm, "Child Labour and International Trade: An Economic Perspective," *Institute for Development Economics*, 22 (1997); also, Mediha Murshed, "Unraveling Child Labor and Labor Legislation," *Journal of International Affairs*, 55, no. 1 (Fall 2001).

¹³ Amnesty International, "Children's Rights," June 2000, <<http://web.amnesty.org>>; also Opinion Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, "Campaign against the Enlistment of Child Soldiers and Their Participation in Armed Conflicts," Doc. 8696, April 3, 2000.

forced to fight and kill and who are scarred forever by their actions.¹⁴ Boys also are appearing on the front lines of the drug trade—as deadly enforcers. Recently featured in the *New York Times Magazine*, “Tiny” is a fourteen-year-old *sicario* (assassin) from Medellín, Colombia, who conducted his first “hit” at the age of twelve. Fueled by poverty, the drug trade, and a disintegrating civil society due to more than forty years of armed conflict, boys such as “Tiny” are left to raise themselves in violent, hopeless environments, believing they have few other life options than serving as murderers for hire.¹⁵

Educating Boys for the Sake of Peace

Although a variety of strategies must be employed to help these boys, improving their educational opportunities needs to be a key component. These educational opportunities must include not only academic training but also life skills training and the promotion of tolerance and inclusion, for we have clear evidence of what happens when education is narrow in scope and biased in nature.

Education is at the heart of the Hindu revivalist movement in India. The Hindu right wing supports schools such as Sewa Dham in Mandoli, outside of New Delhi. There, nearly three hundred boys from poor families live and study for free. They learn Hindu chants, Sanskrit, and vegetarianism. While this sounds promising, the children at the school are also taught prejudice: They learn to celebrate Hindu warriors and revile Babur, the sixteenth-century Muslim emperor. Vidya Bharati, a Hindu nationalist education charity, runs twenty thousand private schools, serving 2.4 million children, and is adding more than one thousand new schools per year. These efforts, along with a push to replace history books considered insufficiently nationalist and pro-Hindu, are aimed at reshaping public schooling to advance a calculated political, economic, and social agenda.¹⁶

In Pakistan, meanwhile, *madrassas*, a type of Islamic school, train boys in Islamic extremism—and some in war. Leaders of the Taliban and many of their soldiers who occupied and terrorized Afghanistan were educated in Pakistan’s *madrassas*. A crumbling public-school infrastructure that lacks buildings, teachers, materials, and many other essentials for quality education, along with a declining level of government spending on education, has allowed nationalist and extremist nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to take advantage of the lack of civil-society infrastructure. In 1978, there were three thousand *madrassas* in Pakistan; today there are approximately thirty-nine thousand. Furthermore, some five hundred opened in 2001 alone.¹⁷ As *New York Times* reporter Rick Bragg writes, “The *madrassas*’ sword is the narrow education they offer and the devotion they engender from students from the poorest classes who, without them, would have nowhere to go, or go hungry.”¹⁸

Given that in most cultures men have been and will continue to be holders of society’s positions of privilege and power, boys, as future politicians, bureaucrats, academics, family breadwinners,

¹⁴ Center for Defense Information, “Child Soldiers: Invisible Combatants,” originally broadcast in June 1997, <<http://www.cdi.org/adm/Transcripts/1042/>>.

¹⁵ Eliza Griswold, “The 14-Year-Old Hit Man,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 28, 2002.

¹⁶ Somini Sengupta, “Hindu Right Goes to School to Build a Nation,” *New York Times*, May 13, 2002.

¹⁷ Raymond Bonner, “Pakistani Schools: Meager Fare for Hungry Minds,” *New York Times*, March 31, 2002; also Thomas L. Friedman, “In Pakistan, It’s Jihad 101,” *New York Times*, November 13, 2001.

¹⁸ Rick Bragg, “Shaping Young Islamic Hearts and Hatreds,” *New York Times*, October 14, 2001.

husbands, and soldiers, must be taught to respect the rights of women and girls. This is as principled a stance as it is practical, for women's progress ultimately propels a society's progress. Unfortunately, education and civic efforts to train men too often not only exclude women but also exclude any consideration of ensuring equal rights or the importance of basic social welfare for women. Prior to the June 2001 special United Nations session on AIDS, Mozambique's prime minister, Dr. Pascoal Mocumbi, called for programs that not only build girls' self-esteem but also build boys' respect for girls' rights. He said, "As a man, I know men's behavior must change, that we must raise boys differently, to have any hope of eradicating HIV and preventing the emergence of another such scourge."¹⁹

The growing focus on girls' education as a global development tool has at times provoked envy among men. Bangladesh's largest NGO, BRAC (the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), has made tremendous strides in improving the health and well-being of girls since the 1970s. BRAC has been attacked, however, by traditionalists angered not only by its growing influence but also by its focus on and resource allocation to females.²⁰ This zero-sum game mentality is destructive to the community as a whole. More legitimate nonprofit organizations are needed not just to serve the basic needs of boys and young men, but also to teach them how to live equitably in a world filled with women.

The Global Fund for Children's Response to the Problem: Funding Effective Grassroots Organizations

Founded in 1994, the Global Fund for Children identifies and invests in community-based programs around the world to enhance the lives of children and youth. GFC is one of the few organizations that provide funding to innovative grassroots organizations that are working specifically with boys. These NGOs are at the forefront of serving at-risk boys, offering basic aid and nonformal education as the building blocks of opportunity and hope. In numerous developing nations, nonformal education comprises much if not all of a child's education. However, when done well, nonformal education provides the life skills necessary to ensure self-sufficiency and meaningful participation in one's community. Boys are exposed to basic education as well as vocational skills, human rights issues (including gender equality), conflict resolution, computer skills, awareness building, and training in reproductive health, hygiene, environmental issues, microenterprise development, and artistic expression.

Education to Fight Exclusion Project Dakar, Senegal

A number of GFC's grantees place particular emphasis on teaching the importance of tolerance and acceptance in their programming. This is not only seen as an important component of character education, but more importantly as a critical strategy to dampen the rise of cultural tensions and violence catalyzed by poverty, frustration, and hopelessness. For example, the Education to Fight Exclusion Project in Dakar, Senegal, run by the Synapse Network Center, provides schooling for homeless and impoverished boys. Many of these boys are placed in traditional schools, or *daaras*, by desperate parents wishing to educate their children but unable to afford or gain admission for their children to local schools. Unfortunately, many of the *daara*

¹⁹ Pascoal Mocumbi, "A Time for Frankness on AIDS and Africa," *New York Times* Op-Ed, June 20, 2001.

²⁰ "NGOs in Bangladesh: Helping or interfering?" *Economist*, September 15 2001.

students, known as *talibes*, live in substandard conditions and receive a narrow education, one that is intolerant of other cultures and disrespectful of women and girls.

The Synapse Network Center removes *talibes* from the Islamic schools, provides them life-skills training, and refocuses their education from the male-dominated teachings of the *daaras* to a worldview that celebrates diversity, nurtures tolerance, and promotes the rights of women and children. For example, use of the children's native languages is encouraged and supported; images of ethnic minorities and girls are integrated into educational materials and textbooks alongside more conventional images; and children and teachers receive training on human rights issues and identify strategies to tackle violence and harness diversity within their community.

*Afghan Institute of Learning
Afghanistan and Pakistan*

During the Taliban regime's reign in Afghanistan, GFC helped fund secret home schools for girls, as the education of females was illegal. The grantee partner in this work, the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL), has expanded its mandate now to include the education of boys. Recognizing the profound and negative impacts of war, dislocation, and destitution, and hoping to break the cycle of hate, AIL is offering boys in refugee camps and those in returning refugee populations a broad curriculum that focuses on reading, writing, arithmetic, life skills, and human rights. The boys' social-studies curriculum includes a Peace Training and Education module promoting respect for others, the importance of nonviolent conflict resolution, and the inherent tolerance of Islam. GFC recently provided AIL with an emergency grant to open twenty schools for a minimum of six hundred Afghan refugee boys in United Nations refugee camps. AIL has been able to reach approximately nine hundred boys and received additional GFC funding this spring to serve boys in returning refugee populations as well.

*Life Pieces to Masterpieces
Washington, D.C., United States*

The Global Fund for Children also recognizes that poor boys in developed countries face daunting challenges as well, especially boys from minority populations who are trapped in stagnant urban centers with poor education systems and few legitimate economic prospects. GFC is a supporter of Life Pieces to Masterpieces, a Washington, D.C.-based arts and life skills program for disadvantaged African American boys aged three to twenty-one. Larry Quick, the founder of Life Pieces to Masterpieces, saw all around him African American boys struggling not only with poverty but with the need to learn how to become responsible men. Quick, the product of a childhood spent largely in the housing projects of the District of Columbia, knew firsthand the toll that poverty and hopelessness can take on a boy's soul. As an artist, he also knew that art could help rebuild a boy's hope. Not only have program participants improved their school attendance and reading skills, they are showing and selling their original artwork around the country. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of the boys' artwork goes to an educational bank account for the young artists. The waiting list for entering the program is three hundred names long.

Conclusion

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. A number of innovative indigenous nongovernmental organizations have crafted important programs to aid and heal these children and restore the salve of opportunity, yet they are burdened by overwhelming need and insufficient funding. These organizations exist where hope and hopelessness wage epic battles for the hearts and minds of the world's children. Only when the availability of financial ammunition equals the task at hand will these agents of positive social change be able to respond to this urgent call to action.