

# »» Educating girls: an opportunity to counteract rapid population growth



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Education is a fundamental prerequisite for socio-economic progress. One of the aims of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is therefore to ensure that all boys and girls will complete primary and secondary school education by 2030. This is an ambitious goal: in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, only a third of pupils currently complete lower secondary education, and a significant majority of them are boys. In countries such as Chad and the Central African Republic, less than 15 % of 12 to 15 year-old girls attended lower secondary school in 2014.

Of the approximately 200 million illiterate people living south of the Sahara desert, almost 59 % are women. As a result of their situation, they are often excluded from participating in a globalised world. Only 21.5 % of employed women are working in paid positions. Just under half of these women work in the informal sector without any social security. A third of all women work unpaid in family-run businesses.

The developmental potential of improved education for girls has been proven to be great: it not only reduces the risk of poverty for entire families, but it is also an extremely effective lever for ensuring the urgently required reduction of the birth rate in Africa, which is still much too high.

## The link between poverty, education and population growth

Each additional school year completed means an average lifetime earnings increase of 10 %. Better education is also generally associated with an increased awareness of health risks, and an increased income reduces the financial burden of appropriate medical care and medicines in case of illness. As a result, people in developing countries who are better educated are also generally healthier. And when the health situation of families is secured, there is less incentive for parents to ensure their social

protection by having as many children as possible.

Secondary education for girls has particularly positive effects as according to expert estimations, it helps to prevent around one million child marriages a year (and therefore also pregnancies in childhood). As a result, women who have completed secondary education have on average significantly fewer children compared to women who have completed primary education or no education at all (see graph).

## Demographic change - both an opportunity and a risk

Improved access to education leads to an improved health situation (including reduced maternal and infant mortality rates) relatively quickly; it can however temporarily speed up population growth. The reduced desire to have children only comes into effect after a few years, but it more than compensates the effects of better health, meaning a lower population growth rate in the long term.

Measures to ensure the targeted promotion of productive employment are required to ensure that this does not lead to widespread youth unemployment and social upheaval during the transitional phase. A well-managed demographic change can trigger a massive economic upswing. In the Four Asian Tigers, this type of demographic dividend at times accounted for around a third of economic growth.

## Specific approaches for promoting education for girls

The following measures have proved particularly suitable for promoting secondary education for girls:

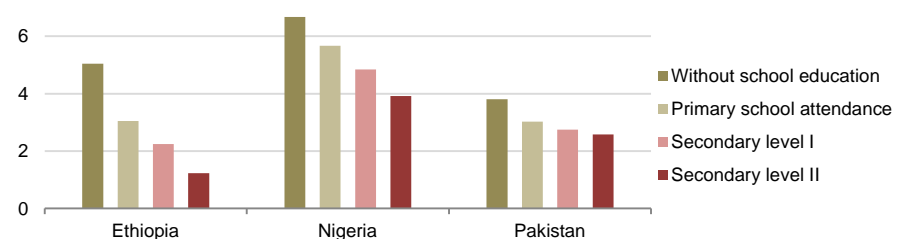
- Financial aid earmarked for poor families (as compensation for the temporary loss of labour provided by girls in the family);
- Targeted scholarship programmes for talented girls from poor families in secondary school (as well as boarding schools for girls, in appropriate cases);
- Promotion of role models (e.g. female teachers as role models).

Of course, all measures which strengthen the education system as a whole also help, such as improving the quality of education (e.g. curricula, teacher training and further education), promoting vocational training and securing educational funding. Many countries are still way off the UNESCO targets which recommend they spend 15-20 % of the national budget on educational activities. Development Cooperation can only partially close this gap. ■

## Literature

Klingholz, R.; Kaps, A. (2017): Higher economic growth and lower population growth. Why school attendance is important for girls. In: *KfW – Materials on Development Financing*, URL: [https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/PDF/Download-Center/Materialien/2017\\_Nr.8\\_Mädchenbildung.pdf](https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/PDF/Download-Center/Materialien/2017_Nr.8_Mädchenbildung.pdf) [08/05/17]

Figure 1: Educated mothers have fewer children



Source: Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital (2015). Wittgenstein Centre Data Explorer Version 1.2. Available at: [www.wittgensteincentre.org/dataexplorer](http://www.wittgensteincentre.org/dataexplorer).