

**SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS,
DEMOCRACY, AND GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES
BARRIERS TO EDUCATION GLOBALLY: GETTING GIRLS IN THE CLASSROOM
TESTIMONY BY SUSAN MARKHAM, SENIOR COORDINATOR FOR GENDER
EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT
U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

JUNE 15, 2016

Good afternoon, Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Boxer and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the critical issue of girls' access to education around the world.

USAID is grateful for Congress'—and particularly this Committee's—longstanding bipartisan support for women's empowerment and gender equality and helping all children, everywhere, get the education they deserve. Congress has been a key driver in both improving education around the world, including addressing barriers to girls' education such as gender-based violence in the context of early and forced marriage.

It is an honor to be joined by my colleague, Ambassador Cathy Russell, from the State Department and by others working to improve access to education for all girls as a cornerstone investment that can truly unlock human potential on a transformational scale.

On a recent trip to Malawi, the Chief Director for Basic and Secondary Education shared with me a conversation she had with a prominent village leader. When asked how many children the village leader had, he responded, "I have three kids and two girls." This response underscores how girls continue to be marginalized in many homes and societies. Such marginalization is problematic, because the extent to which females are valued determines whether newborn girls are allowed to survive in places where female infanticide is practiced, or whether girls are registered at birth to receive documents necessary to establish legal identity, enroll in school, register a marriage, own land, and make health care decisions, access income opportunities, and assert democratic rights.

Gender norms often determine the way households allocate resources to sons and daughters, influence family decisions about education, where they work, what they eat, and how they spend their time. While girls are expected to complete chores, collect water and firewood, and watch over other children, boys are expected to attend school, become breadwinners, and represent the family in public gatherings and forums.

In many places, as girls approach puberty, their world shrinks as mobility and opportunities decrease. As a girl grows older the fight to get an education becomes even harder. She risks long, unsafe walks to school. She may be forced to marry, as young as eleven or twelve years old, and her family must be willing to pay school fees instead of receiving a dowry. In times of insecurity due to poverty, drought, conflict and instability, the pressure for girls to marry becomes even

greater due to the strain on family resources. For these reasons, and many more, an estimated 100 million girls will drop out before completing primary school.

To change this dynamic, we must focus on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide, while also engaging men and boys. The United States has put gender equality and the advancement of women and girls at the forefront of the three pillars of our foreign policy—diplomacy, development, and defense. This is embodied in President Obama's National Security Strategy, the Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development, and the 2010 and 2015 U.S. Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Reviews. But more must be done. Women's empowerment is critical to USAID's core mission of ending extreme poverty and promoting resilient, democratic societies while addressing pressing health and education challenges.

Statement of the Problem and Statistics

Globally, 62 million girls under 18 years old are not in school. 250 million girls live in poverty. One in three girls in the developing world is married by the time she is 18, and one in nine is married by the age of 15. Early and unintended pregnancy can be both the cause and a consequence of dropping out of school. In 2015, in 56 USAID-assisted countries, approximately 22 million adolescent girls ages 15 to 19 had begun childbearing and, of these, 4.3 million had had a second or third child. Millions more live in conflict settings that increase the risks of gender-based violence. Adolescent girls and young women are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, where seven in ten new infections in adolescents aged 15-19 are among girls.

Even so, there is reason for optimism. While adolescence is a time of great vulnerability for girls, it is also an ideal point to leverage development efforts. It is an opportunity to disrupt poverty from becoming a permanent condition that is passed from one generation to the next. And a pivotal factor for an adolescent girl during this time of vulnerability is whether she stays in school.

Education is a crucial aspect of increasing girls' opportunities to participate fully in their societies. It is the first step in changing values and norms around women and girls. USAID knows from decades of experience that education is central to unlocking human potential on a transformational scale. Yet, societies do not fully benefit from the contributions of women and girls due to their lack of access to education. In every region in the world, women are underrepresented in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, limiting countries' abilities to harness their talent and skills and address development challenges.

Based on data from 105 countries, researchers concluded that investments in universal primary and secondary education played a "decisive role" in bringing countries out of poverty and reducing fertility rates. Countries that invest in girls' education have lower maternal and infant deaths, lower rates of HIV/AIDS, and better child nutrition. Among adolescents, greater educational attainment is associated with delayed sexual initiation and increased likelihood of contraceptive use. It is estimated that almost 60 percent fewer girls would become pregnant under the age of 17 years in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia if they all had a

secondary education. Girls with secondary schooling are up to six times less likely to marry as children compared to girls who have little or no education.

And in many places, without a quality education, young people are in danger of being exploited, forced to work, conscripted as child soldiers, or become prey to violent extremism. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, women and girls together account for about 70 percent of trafficking victims, with girls representing two out of every three children trafficked. Whether girls are trafficked into forced labor, domestic servitude, or sex slavery, trafficking disrupts a girl's ability to go to school, and puts her at great risk of gender-based violence.

Educated girls can have a positive impact on the next generation. Researchers estimate that over 50 percent of the reduction in child deaths between 1970 and 2009 could be attributed to increased educational attainment in women of reproductive age. Each additional year of a mother's education increases the likelihood that she will use prenatal care. Children of educated mothers are more likely than those of uneducated mothers to have higher birth weights, are less likely to die in infancy, and more likely to be immunized. And the benefits of education to girls go beyond health and nutrition. The proof: an extra year of secondary schooling can increase girls' future earnings by 10-20 percent. And if ten percent more girls attend school, a country's GDP increases by an average of three percent.

Simply put, when women are educated, they are a powerful force for change. They have the tools to better participate in the formal economy and earn an income—and are poised to make a tremendous difference in all areas of their life. Women are more likely to reinvest their earnings back into their families to improve education, nutrition, and health, helping to break the cycle of poverty.

USAID's Approach

Education Strategy

USAID's current education strategy focuses on the following goals: primary grade reading; education in crisis or conflict; and workforce development and higher education. The Agency continually works to increase gender integration and attention across the approximate \$1 billion annual education investment. Through these efforts, USAID's education programs continue to reach girls, including adolescent girls, in programs that provide learning opportunities and prepare girls with the skills they need to succeed.

From 2011 to 2015, USAID reached nearly 38 million individual primary school students—roughly equal numbers of girls and boys—with reading programs to improve instruction and learning outcomes. The Agency improved or established quality education in safe learning environments for nearly 12 million children and youth in conflict and crisis environments, of whom an estimated 47 percent were girls and 2.4 million of whom were previously out-of-school. Our workforce development programs supported approximately 300,000 girls to gain new or better employment. In Somalia, girls and young women represent 79 percent of those whom USAID helped gain access to education; in Afghanistan, where 40 percent of primary school students are female, girls and young women represent 58 percent of those gaining access

to education through our programs. USAID places an emphasis on girls in our education programs because of the development dividends of educating girls and because they are more vulnerable, at risk of dropping out at higher rates, and often face more challenges than their male counterparts to stay in school.

Whole-of-Girl Strategy

USAID's "whole-of-girl" approach addresses the interconnected events that resonate throughout a girl's life from birth to adulthood. For instance, the recently released Implementation Plan of the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls reflects USAID's engagement with adolescent girls, aged 10 to 19, in this holistic manner. This strategy provides a comprehensive framework for the Agency to address the diversity of opportunities, possibilities, and challenges that adolescent girls encounter. The USAID Implementation Plan of this strategy does this by furthering efforts to mainstream and integrate gender throughout programs and interventions; by documenting progress through data, integrating lessons learned, and promoting best practices; and by expanding collaborations and partnerships. Additionally, new programs will be implemented in sectors where the specific needs of adolescent girls and the barriers they face are well understood, such as in child, early, and forced marriage.

Additionally, in March 2015, the President and First Lady launched Let Girls Learn, which employs this holistic approach to change the perception of girls' value at the individual, community and institutional levels; fosters an enabling environment for adolescent girls' education; and engages and equips girls to make life decisions and important contributions to society. One of USAID's key contributions to the Let Girls Learn initiative include the Let Girls Learn Challenge Fund to help adolescent girls thrive by utilizing a unique mechanism for USAID and public organizations, private sector companies, governments, and international donor organizations to co-create, co-fund, pilot, and implement innovative programs to ensure that adolescent girls enroll and succeed in school, with an initial focus on Malawi and Tanzania. Additional USAID's Let Girls Learn commitments include a five-year, \$180 million partnership with the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) which includes accelerated and alternative learning programs for out-of-school girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and addresses sexual and gender based violence issues that prevent girls from attending and completing primary education; \$100 million in Jordan to build 25 new schools, 70 percent of which will be schools for girls, to alleviate overcrowding due to the influx of Syrian refugees; and a \$70 million commitment to advance girls' education through new and ongoing USAID programs benefiting over 200,000 adolescent girls in Pakistan.

Through Let Girls Learn and decades of work to lift up adolescent girls, USAID programs work across sectors to ensure that all girls have access to a quality education by addressing the root causes that keep girls out of school and limit their ability to make life decisions. Within these programs, USAID works to engage women and girls as well as men and boys as advocates to promote gender equality and equal opportunity. The Agency's programs address the differentiated needs of girls in specific stages of adolescence, recognizing that the challenges young adolescents encounter are distinct from those experienced by older adolescents approaching adulthood.

In part to keep girls in school, USAID focuses on addressing a wide range of vulnerabilities for adolescent girls, including early pregnancy, malnutrition, menstrual hygiene, gender-based violence, HIV, and economic barriers, including school fees and the cost of materials to attend school. To address these vulnerabilities, USAID implements programs that promote positive gender norms and behaviors, equitable access to resources, and prevention and response to gender-based violence, including child, early, and forced marriage.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, USAID's basic education programming has empowered 118,963 adolescent girls through scholarships, tutoring and mentoring, training in preventing gender-based violence and improving school environments. This program has improved adolescent girls' transition from primary to lower secondary education. In addition, through the program's mentoring activities, girls are empowered to play leadership roles in their schools and communities.

In Bangladesh, the our girls' education program works with secondary schools to incentivize students, teachers, school administration and parents to ensure girls feel safe and have a place where they can thrive. Currently, the campaign reaches more than 100,000 adolescent students of which 60 percent are girls—and has brought 265 married and divorced girls back to school, led to a 10 percent decrease in child marriage, and achieved a 30 percent decrease in girls' dropout rates compared to 2014 rates. As a result, the campaign model will be scaled nationwide by the Government of Bangladesh.

The inception of USAID's "whole-of-girl" approach begins at birth, a critical period of time where USAID has done important work towards registering all children, particularly girls, in developing countries for decades. Birth registration is essential for accessing critical services and protecting rights such as proving one's identity, owning property, enrolling in educational programs, gaining employment, opening a bank account, conferring citizenship on one's children, and voting. USAID has spearheaded registration as part of work to provide improved access to services for orphans and vulnerable children, strengthen governments' capacities to provide reliable registry services, and assist in family reunification efforts. For example, the PEPFAR-funded Nilinde Orphans and Vulnerable Children program in Kenya works to improve inheritance, birth certificate, and guardianship systems to further protect vulnerable children and their families and to provide access to services such as education and health services. Birth registration also results in improved population data that will be a valuable tool for designing evidence-driven programs and ensuring that adolescent girls have equal access to services and rights.

Following the enactment of the *Girls Count Act* in 2014, USAID is centralizing documentation of the Agency's efforts to improve civil registries and enable access to birth certificates. We are also working to bolster these efforts through the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls. Additional guidance, currently being developed as part of larger Agency discussions on monitoring and evaluation, will provide further direction to the collection of appropriate and practical data for beneficiary age, marital status, location, and school enrollment status.

Conflict-affected Environments

The number of displaced populations due to crisis and conflict around the world is on the rise, and USAID and the Department of State are working together to address the unique needs and barriers to education for girls impacted by crisis, conflict, and migration, including a physical space to learn. For example, the influx of Syrian refugees into Jordan has had a profound impact on the education sector, particularly public schools. To help meet this challenge, USAID leads an effort in Jordan in partnership with other donors to make available the necessary funds to finance the Ministry of Education's plan to place an additional 50,000 Syrian children in formal education so that all refugees have access to education in the 2016-2017 school year. This raises the total number of Syrian refugees enrolled in formal schools to 193,000 and includes the provision of an additional 102 schools educating two shifts of students per day, raising the total double-shift schools to 200, as a temporary solution to the educational needs of Syrians in Jordan. Donors also intend to scale up support of the government's "catch up program," which aims to enroll an additional 25,000 previously ineligible students inside formal schools to give them the opportunity to catch up to their peers in their age group, be tested, and when ready join their age cohort.

To continue support for girl refugees, this year USAID pledged a \$10 million contribution to Education Cannot Wait, a fund designed to increase safe and quality education so that all children have the opportunity to learn even amid protracted emergency situations.

Looking Ahead

USAID continues to refine tools and interventions to effectively address the unique needs of girls in order to ensure they reach their full potential. The Agency remains resolutely focused on implementing the three objectives of the USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy: (1) Reduce Gender Disparities; (2) Reduce Gender-Based Violence; and (3) Increase Capacity of Women and Girls to Realize their Rights and Influence Decision Making.

Already, USAID is increasing our efforts to coordinate across sectors, including health, food security, conflict and crisis response, economic growth, and more, to address the interlocking barriers that disempower and disadvantage adolescent girls. Sustainable development outcomes depend on engaged collaboration with women and girls themselves, soliciting their knowledge and solutions while deepening their capacity for decision-making and driving social transformation.

USAID envisions a world where females and males are equally able to access quality education and health care; accumulate and control their own economic assets and resources; exercise their own voice; and live free from intimidation, harassment, and discrimination—valued as leaders, innovators, peace-builders, and breadwinners in their communities and societies.

I appreciate the opportunity to share with you what USAID is doing to address barriers to girls' education and look forward to hearing your counsel. I welcome any questions you may have.