



### UNDERSTANDING THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS Supporting a Girl's Right to Learn

Presenter: Cassandra Quin Butts, Esq., Senior Adviser, Office of the Chief Executive Officer, Millennium Challenge Corporation

#### Lesson Description

When women and girls have equal access to education, societies prosper. This lesson examines the many benefits to individuals, families and communities when they prioritize girls' education; how gender discrimination and outdated social constructs are barriers to educational opportunity; and the necessary partnerships required to achieve gender equality in education.

#### Lesson Objectives

1. To understand why it is important to provide equal access to education for women and girls.
2. To learn the long-term consequences for countries that don't make educating women and girls a priority.
3. To learn how to gain community support and implement a successful program to educate women and girls.

#### Discussion Questions

According to the U.N., in developing countries, 87 percent of girls enroll in primary school, but only 39 percent finish lower secondary. Overall in sub-Saharan Africa, fewer than 1 in 5 girls makes it to secondary school, and in the majority of sub-Saharan African countries, fewer than 1 in 10 girls graduates from secondary school.

Girls' attendance in formal school during adolescence is correlated with later marriage, later childbearing, lower rates of HIV/AIDS, fewer hours of domestic and/or labor market work, and greater gender equality. Girls with secondary schooling are up to six times less likely to be married as children. When a girl in the developing world receives seven years of education, she marries four years later and has 2.2 fewer children. Each extra year of a mother's secondary schooling reduces the probability of infant mortality by 5 to 10 percent, and a child born to a mother who can read is 50 percent more likely to live past age 5. Every year of schooling increases a girl's individual earning power by 10 to 20 percent, and the return on secondary education is even higher.

1. Some reasons why girls may not attend school are that their parents are economically dependent on their unpaid work, or a lack of female teachers, gender discrimination in the classroom and inadequate infrastructure, such as a lack of latrines or running water — a particular concern during menstruation. What factors can you identify that keep girls from attending school in your community?
2. What changes in behavior within families and the community would you advocate in order to allow girls to attend school? How would you reach out to individuals and families to determine the scope of the problem in your community?
3. What are achievable "calls to action" that can be employed to increase the number of girls attending school in your community? How would you implement them? How would you build support for your ideas?

#### Developmental Action

1. Perform an analysis and create a plan to support girls' education in your community. Identify a specific issue or concern; identify potential partners, funding sources, goals and objectives, and a strategy for implementation.
2. Organize a volunteer campaign to help alleviate some of the reasons girls are discouraged from attending school — like distributing feminine hygiene products, protection for girls walking to school, or grassroots advocacy for infrastructure and nutrition support.

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**About the presenter:** **Cassandra Q. Butts, Esq.**, is a lawyer, policy expert and former deputy White House counsel. She currently serves as senior adviser in the Office of the Chief Executive Officer at the Millennium Challenge Corporation. In 2008, Butts was selected by President-elect Obama to serve as deputy White House counsel, focusing on domestic policy and ethics. Prior to her work with the Obama administration, she served as legislative counsel for Senator Harris Wofford (Democrat of Pennsylvania) and assistant counsel on civil rights policy at the NAACP. Butts holds a B.A. in political science from the University of North Carolina and a law degree from Harvard.

