Education has proven to be an important tool to increase agricultural productivity and reduce poverty and malnutrition. However, girls in developing countries often have less access than boys to basic education and women receive only five percent of agricultural extension services worldwide.¹ --United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

If women had better access to farming land, fertilizers and agricultural training, yields in sub-Saharan Africa would improve by as much as 22 per cent.² --The Crawford Fund

A 63-country study by the International Food Policy Research Institute found that expanded female education resulted in better farming practices, which contributed to about 40 percent of the decline in malnutrition.³ --United States Embassy United Nations Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight objectives designed by the UN to improve social and economic conditions in developing countries by the end of 2015. Each month we focus on the MDGs impacted by our theme and our monthly featured project.

This month we highlight three MDGs:

#1 ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY & HUNGER

#2 ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

#7 ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY
Providing girls with agricultural and business skills ensures food security. Moreover, evidence indicates educated girls are more likely to be good stewards of the environment. For example, studies show forests are better protected when women are involved in their conservation.¹

Women are responsible for half of the world’s food production, and in most developing countries they produce between 60 and 80 percent of the food. However, “women continue to be regarded as home producers or assistants on the farm, and not as farmers and economic agents on their own merit.”²

**Challenge:** Worldwide, women own less than two percent of all property, and millions of rural women in developing countries cannot legally own land. Consequently, “women often have no legal recourse to prevent environmental destruction of the lands they depend on for food and income. Women are also routinely forced off of or given only restricted access to fertile land.”³

**Solution:** Equitable access to land and water use can empower women and help address the root causes of poverty and gender inequality. Women need to be granted equal access to owning and farming fertile land.

**Challenge:** The total global population of girls ages 10 to 24 —already the largest in history — is expected to peak in the next decade.⁴ Unfortunately, in a majority of developing countries girls continue to face discrimination with regards to access to school. As a result, they comprise about 57% of all out-of-school children.⁵

**Solution:** Ensure girls are educated, because investing in girls has the highest untapped return in development.

- Universal primary education would cost $10 billion a year -- half what Americans spend on ice cream.⁶
- When girls are educated through secondary school, they bring 25 percent more income into their families.⁷

**Education, Food Security, and Environmental Care:**

**Nurturing Minds, Tanzania**

Due to poverty, many girls in Tanzania drop out of school before they even finish primary (elementary) school. In some cases they lose their parents to Malaria, HIV/AIDS or other diseases. Others are just too poor to afford uniforms, books or transport to school, or have such a high burden of household chores at home, or in someone else’s home, working to support themselves, that there is no time for school.
Nurturing Minds’ Sega Girls’ School provides quality academic education to marginalized girls, emphasizing leadership skills, social responsibility, self-sustainability and environmental care.

- The school curriculum incorporates opportunities for experiential learning about the environment such as field trips to the Uluguru; learning about and planting of indigenous trees; and application of agro-forestry techniques on the school’s land.

- The school’s physical features such as solar panels, rainwater harvesting, and efficient fuel system, in addition to minimizing environmental impacts of the school, are integrated into the curriculum and provide important learning opportunities. An organic garden provides fifty percent of the school’s fruits and vegetables.

- DFW’s donations will support the school’s first school-run business—Poultry Farming—and develop related business and technical skills among its students.

- The poultry farming business will be particularly relevant when considering the current food security situation in Tanzania, causing significant food cost spikes. This business will help maintain food security for the school and eventually serve as a profitable income generating business.

- Secondary education opens the door for a girl to continue developing herself and her opportunities and enter into a career of her choice. Without secondary education, this door is almost closed.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. Universal primary education would cost $10 billion a year -- half the amount Americans spend on ice cream. Why is universal primary education still underfunded by developing nations?

2. Worldwide, women own less than two percent of all property. Women in developing countries are routinely forced off of or given only restricted access to fertile land. Why, in 2011, does this gender inequality still exist? What are some ways it can be changed?

3. The Sega Girls’ School features solar panels, rainwater harvesting, an efficient fuel system, and an organic vegetable garden. Are there any “green” schools in your community that include sustainable practices to minimize environmental impact?
Voices: Women We Serve

The following interviews and photographs were provided by Nurturing Minds, Tanzania.

People regard me differently now that I go to school. They even ask me questions about my school because they would like to join where I am. They kind of respect me these days as they see I’m not just a person staying in the streets but that I’m going to school, which is more beneficial. -- Lucy

At first we didn’t know how to use computers, but now we know how to make and save files, play games, and write on the computer. In other schools even at form VI you don’t know computer, but in ours we are learning early. -- Martha

I like gardening because I like learning how to plant seeds and even how to weed, and I know that this will help me when I have my own garden. I will not be spending money on buying vegetables. Instead I will have them on my own. – Subira

Sources:


Ibid.


