


A young girl with dark skin and curly hair, wearing a pink shirt, is raising her right arm high in the air. She is holding a silver pen in her hand. She is looking towards the right side of the frame with an expectant expression. In the background, other children are visible, also looking in the same direction. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

The Investment Case for

**EDUCATION  
AND  
EQUITY**

unite for  
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Cover photograph:  
Students in a classroom in Kursa Primary School in  
the Afar region of Ethiopia.  
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Inside cover photograph:  
Students hold up their hands at a school in Uganda.  
The school has experienced an influx of students who  
fled South Sudan because of violence in the country.

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**EDUCATION  
AND  
EQUITY**

# Acknowledgements

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# Foreword

Education is a right and a crucial opportunity. It holds the key to a better life for a billion children and adolescents worldwide: a life with less poverty, better health and an increased ability to take their future into their own hands. Education, particularly girls' education, is also one of the most powerful tools for creating economic growth, decreasing the likelihood of conflict, increasing resilience and impacting future generations with wide-reaching economic and social benefits.

Progress towards education for all was unprecedented between 2000 and 2007 and resulted in a decline in the number of primary-school-age children from 100 million to 60 million. In recent years, however, progress has stalled, leaving the most vulnerable children excluded from education and learning. In 2012, nearly 58 million children of primary school age and about 63 million adolescents of lower secondary school age were still out of school. Many of them live in conflict-afflicted regions and emergency situations. Many are poor and live in rural areas. Many also face discrimination because of ethnic origin, language, gender or disability. In addition, pre-primary education is underdeveloped, particularly in low-income countries, where the average gross enrolment ratio is 19 per cent.

Even more importantly, there is a learning crisis that urgently needs to be addressed. Evidence shows that even if children go to school, they often do not acquire the basic competencies due to the poor quality of education provided. It is estimated that 130 million children do not learn to read or write despite reaching Grade 4. This failure to

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