



**BALID**

British Association for  
Literacy in Development

**Women Empowered by Literacy and Education**  
A statement from BALID for International Women's Day

Women and girls in the developing countries of the world face serious inequalities compared with men and boys. Much of the responsibility for providing for their families rests on their shoulders. However, they have fewer educational opportunities and their life-chances are more restricted.

Inability to read and write affects more women than men. According to the latest estimates, 776 million adults around the world are unable to read and write. Two thirds of these are women. This figure has changed little in recent years in spite of considerable international attention through the United Nations Decade for Literacy (2003-2012) and the UNESCO Education for All initiative which set targets for education to be met by 2015.

The benefits of literacy and education for women are clear. Women who are literate are more confident, and more involved in family and community decision making. Their children are less likely to die at a young age, they are better fed, and are more likely to attend school than the children of non-literate parents. Literacy and education, especially when they are provided in the mother tongue of the learners or a language which they know well, underpin successful development activities in all sectors.

The current international focus on primary education for all children worldwide is a step in the right direction. It has led to an increase in the numbers of girls receiving some formal education, especially in Africa and Asia. But there is still a long way to go and serious issues remain about the quality of education which girls receive and whether it is sufficiently sustained to make a significant difference to their chances in life.

As one woman in Cameroon commented recently, "Learning to read is really good because I used to be asleep but now, with the literacy classes, I feel I've woken up."

BALID works to promote literacy and education in developing countries, including an awareness of the impact of gender on development.

British Association for Literacy in Development,  
36 Causton Street,  
London SW1P 4AU  
Email: [admin@balid.org.uk](mailto:admin@balid.org.uk)  
tel: 0207 592 3962  
[www.balid.org.uk](http://www.balid.org.uk)