

EDUCATION FOR ALL
التربية للجميع
EDUCACION PARA TODOS
全民教育
ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ ДЛЯ ВСЕХ

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EDUCATION POUR TOUS

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FOCUS

EDUCATION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

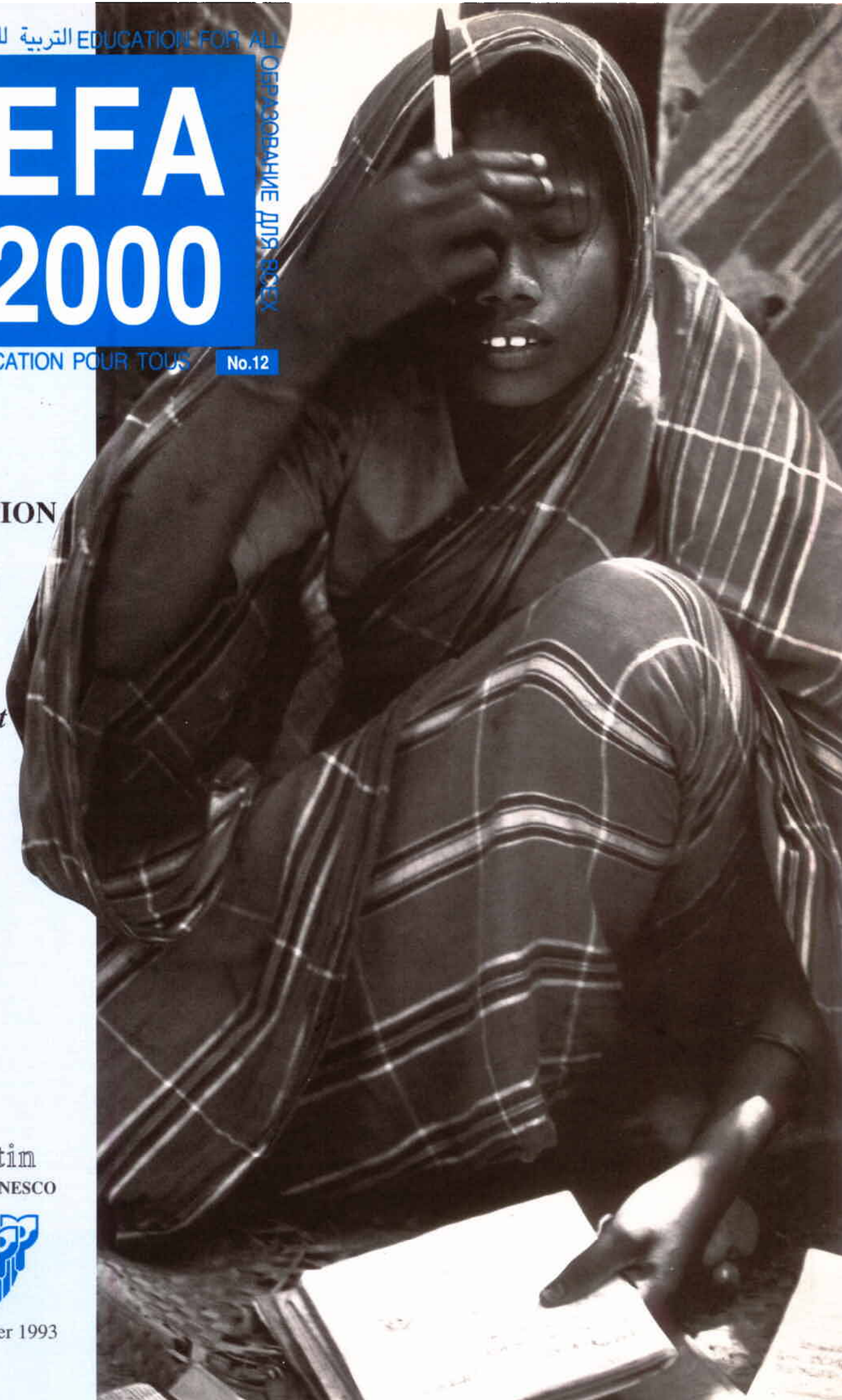
*An urgent
necessity*

Bulletin

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Education for women:

High time to stop talking and start acting

OPINION

Despite endless declarations made at numerous and costly international conferences, governments are a far cry from living up to their commitment to reduce gender disparities in education.

While progress has been achieved in some countries, in too many cases women's position in society, and their education, is far from satisfactory. Their lower status in both industrialized and developing countries is rooted in economic inequality, discrimination with regard to access to power, society's reluctance to change attitudes, and sexually discriminatory practices and habits that negatively affect the education of women and girls.

This is a sad state of affairs as education is perhaps the most important tool to ensure that women become equal partners with men in society. But there is another reason why education for women and girls deserves higher priority: governments still don't seem to understand the tremendously positive effect this education can have on their societies' economic development.

The numerous studies that have been made on this subject come to the same conclusion: education for girls and women improves the economic well-being of a country, enables a better use of family planning and results in the fall of the birth rate. It also reduces infant mortality and malnutrition, and increases life expectancy.

Realizing facts is one thing, developing an effective action plan is another. This is what governments have to do: First, ensure that education for women and girls is a top political priority. Decide on a dual track approach — universal primary education and non-formal programmes for adults — and put the necessary budget behind it. Enlist community support. Launch programmes which, to be successful, should include a participatory and integrated approach. Use only pedagogic methods and teaching aids that are relevant to the needs and concerns of the learners, and bring them into the teaching process. Schedule the classes when women are most likely to come — lack of time is probably the most important obstacle to get women to attend classes. Choose the language in which the learners are motivated to learn and finally, select female teachers to make the learners more comfortable which in turn will boost achievement.

It is high time to stop talking and start acting. Education for women and girls is imperative in promoting quality of life but it can only make a significant contribution to society if linked up with true development strategies and structural changes in society.

Marcela Ballara

*Ms. Ballara has worked for many years as a researcher and consultant on adult education and literacy with non-governmental organizations. She is the author of *Women and Literacy*, published by Zed Books Ltd (Women & World Development Series) 1992.*

Did you know that...

●● In 1990 some 130 million children were out-of-school, 81 million of them were girls.

●● One out of three adult women in the world today cannot read and write, compared with one out of five adult males. In sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States and South Asia, two out of three women are illiterate.

●● The proportion of girls in primary school worldwide increased from 44 percent in 1980 to 47 percent in 1990. Only two regions did not make headway in this area: the Arab States, where the proportion of girls to boys actually dropped from almost 50 percent in 1980 to only 42 percent by 1990, and South Asia, where no significant progress was achieved.

●● Sub-Saharan Africa managed to increase the proportion of girls in school from 40 percent in 1980 — the lowest in the world — to 44 percent in 1990, thereby approaching the world average of 47 percent.

Source: Education for All: Status and Trends (UNESCO, 1993).



Photo: O. VIDAL

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GIRLS and
WOMEN