

Mehmet Somuncu

# Achieving Universal Primary Education in Mountains

## Turkey's Education Campaign for Girls: "Off to School, Girls!" ("Haydi Kizlar Okula!")

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Turkey's Millennium Development Goals Report was published in 2005. In this report, Turkey's commitments and goals for achieving the MDGs are explicitly presented, and activities carried out since the year 2000 and their concrete results are also included. Turkey takes the MDGs as a national challenge. Providing primary education to the entire country is one of the country's Millennium Goals, since 1 million Turkish children of primary school age do not go to school. This figure contains a larger number of girls than boys, with a gender gap of 7%. More than 50% of these 1 million children between the ages of 6 and 14 live in the remote and mountainous eastern and

southeastern provinces. For this reason, a campaign known as "Off to School, Girls!" ("Haydi Kizlar Okula!") was initiated in 2003 by the Ministry of National Education (MONE) with the support of UNICEF, in order to eliminate the enrolment gap between boys and girls and increase enrolment and the attendance rate of girls in these regions. Turkey carried out studies on primary education parallel to the campaign. These focused on increasing the number of school buildings and classrooms and the capacities of primary boarding schools, broadening the bussing education system, meeting the school requirements of poor students, and providing tools and materials for schools.

### Barriers to education of girls in mountain areas

The reasons why children of primary school age do not attend school differ in rural and urban areas, and in mountainous and lowland areas of Turkey. Various

**FIGURE 1** Girls in Niğde, in the Taurus Mountains, are forced by their parents to work at home or in the fields instead of going to school. (Photo by Mehmet Somuncu)



socioeconomic difficulties work against the basic education of children, especially of girls living in mountainous provinces:

- Since most families experience economic hardship, they cannot afford the expense of educating their children.
- The schools are generally far away from settlements or in neighboring villages, so most parents do not want their children, especially their daughters, to travel so far every day.
- Families have a tendency to increase family income by making their children work at home or perform agricultural labor (Figure 1).
- Most parents care more about their daughters getting married as soon as possible than them having a good education.
- Due to the limited opportunities of secondary education in mountainous areas, interest in primary education is discouraged.
- In some families, there is a traditional prejudice against girls going to school.

### Aiming for Goals 2 and 3

As part of its efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Turkey is working to increase the basic education of these children. For this reason, in 2003, MONE started the "Off to School, Girls!" campaign with the support of UNICEF. The purpose of the campaign is to educate girls in the provinces where the schooling rate is

very low: girls who are excluded from the educational system though they are at the age of compulsory education (ages of 6–14); girls who have never been enrolled in school; and girls who are enrolled but do not attend school. The campaign is being carried out with participation and contributions from professional establishments, civil community establishments, and volunteers, and aims to remove gender inequality in education at primary school level.

In 2003, 10 provinces (Ağrı, Batman, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Muş, Siirt, Şanlıurfa, Şırnak and Van) were targeted by the campaign (Figure 2). These were selected by determining the provinces in which the school enrolment rate of girls at the mandatory school age was the lowest, according to statistical data obtained from census results in 2000. The provinces mentioned are in the mountainous areas in the eastern and southeastern regions of the country, which include the highest mountains in Turkey such as Mt Ararat, Mt Cilo, Mt Süphan, and Mt Tendürek. This region has the lowest school enrolment rate for girls, and the most remote and poorest villages. In the year 2003, the number of children of primary school age in these 10 provinces was 1,555,600. But 263,413 of these children had either never been enrolled in school or had quit school. Among children not going to school at all, the rate for boys was 25.56%, while the rate for girls was 73.43%.

In the year 2004, 23 provinces in the vicinity of the 10 initial provinces were included in the scope of the campaign. In 2005, 20 more provinces were added, thus leading to a total of 53 (Figure 2).

### Organizational structure and process of the campaign

“Off to School, Girls!” was initiated on 17 June 2003, in Van, by the Executive Director of UNICEF, Carol Bellamy, and the Minister of National Education, Dr. Hüseyin Çelik, with a protocol signed between MONE and UNICEF. The campaign is being executed within the framework of a program comprising 5 key steps.

#### Step 1: Organization

The organizational structure and studies on how to execute the campaign are han-

**FIGURE 2** Provinces included in the “Off to School, Girls!” campaign, and date of their inclusion. (Map by Mehmet Somuncu and Andreas Brodbeck)

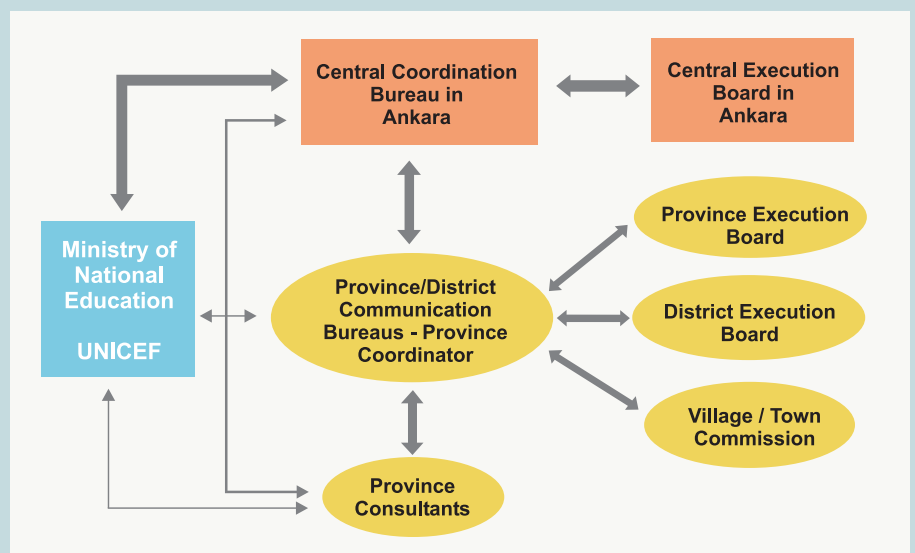


dled at 2 levels: a) The Campaign **Central Management Level**, at which coordination of the campaign is provided, and the basic decisions are made. The Central Execution Board in the capital city, Ankara, performs this task. b) The **Province Implementation Level**, which executes activities in the provinces within the scope of the campaign, is comprised of: the boards and commissions established at the level of province, district, village, and town; province consultants; province coordinators; and province and district communication bureaus (Figure 3).

#### Step 2: Social mobilization

After the central organizational step is completed, local managers, non-govern-

**FIGURE 3** Organizational structure of the campaign. (Source: MONE)



**FIGURE 4** Güleçoba, Diyarbakır: girls whose parents are being persuaded to send them to school. (Photo by Abdullah Çelik)



mental organizations (NGOs), private sector organizations, the media, community leaders, and volunteers willing to participate in the campaign become active. This step involves large-scale dissemination of information. The guidance counselors who will train the managers and teachers in their own schools have already been trained. This training is given in order to inform guidance counselors—the most important actors in the campaign—about the goals and application methods of the campaign. NGOs, professional institutions, and volunteers in the provinces and districts are also informed and trained in order to gain the support of the people and institutions previously mentioned.

Support and promotional materials were also developed for this step. In order to raise the public's awareness of the campaign, print and electronic advertising is done at both national and local levels. Public attention is attracted by recruiting celebrities and important people to talk about the campaign on television. For example, the Minister of Education, the Head of Religious Affairs, and the Prime Minister himself have appeared in short films about the campaign.

#### *Step 3: Determination and evaluation*

Determination activities constitute the next step and include determining those children of school age who have never been enrolled in school and those who do not

attend school for various reasons, although they have been enrolled. Field inspections, compilation of data from the units where child population and health records are kept, and public surveys of students and children not attending school are used for this purpose by the people responsible in the provinces, districts, and villages. Activity plans for the provinces and districts are prepared, based on evaluations carried out following this process of determination.

#### *Step 4: Persuasion and enrollment*

One of the most important stages of the campaign is persuading the families to enrol their children in school. Various methods are used to this end. One of the most influential ones is financial assistance to the families who enrol their children.

The Government has started to apply the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) system procured from the Social Solidarity Fund, beginning in 2004. This involves providing financial aid to poor families who enrol their children in school and ensure that they continue to attend. The aid is YTL 20 (about US\$15) per girl monthly at primary school level, while boys get YTL 16.5 (or about US\$12). The CCT is realized within the framework of the Social Risk Mitigation Project supported by the World Bank. This system aims to encourage the poorest 6% of the population of Turkey to obtain primary education and health opportunities in accordance with the MDGs.

People responsible at the local level of the campaign, such as school counselors, local teachers, civil servants, nurses, midwives, *muhtars* (community leaders), *imams*, and volunteers have played an important role in determining which girls were not attending school and in persuading their families to enrol them (Figure 4).

#### *Step 5: Tracking and evaluation*

The last step in the campaign is tracking and evaluation, dealt with at 2 levels. The first is the tracking of both children who never attended school after enrolment and attending students, in order to encourage continuous attendance by both groups. The second level is the tracking of activities realized during the campaign and the

sending of reports prepared as a result of this activity to the province coordinators.

### Important support for the campaign

Financial support for this campaign is of vital importance. The private sector contributed US\$475,000 to the campaign. UNICEF provided an additional US\$420,000 in funding. MONE has offered a 100% tax credit to private and corporate donors who invest in education. MONE has also been providing free textbooks to all students since 2003.

### First results and positive effects

In the first year of the campaign, results generally exceeded expectations. In the first months of the campaign, 40,000 girls not attending school enrolled in primary school in the 10 mountainous provinces. The rate of increase varied from 2% to 20%, according to the provinces. For example, Siirt had an increase rate of 19.49%, Van 11.08%, and Muş 6.34%. In the 2003–2004 school year, the increase in the number of girl students was 1% for other provinces, while it was 5.8% in the mountainous provinces.

### Conclusion and outlook

When the campaign was initiated in 2003, the primary school attendance rate in

Turkey was 91.95%, and the rate for girls was 90.21%. But from June 2003 to the end of 2004, 120,000 additional girls enrolled in primary education. According to unofficial statistics, the attendance rate for girls in 2004 was 92.16%. Eliminating the gap between boys and girls and ensuring gender equality in primary school enrolment is the main goal of the Ministry of National Education. The purpose of the “Off to School, Girls!” campaign is to provide primary education to all girls in provinces that have the lowest rate of attendance by girls, starting in the underdeveloped mountainous regions. This campaign has generated a very important opportunity for girls of primary school age in these regions, where there is lack of education and gender inequality.

Data on the results of the campaign for 2005 will be collected in the Central Coordination Bureau in Ankara by the end of December 2005, and the report will be published in 2006. The goal for 2005 is to enrol 300,000 girls in primary education and ensure that they continue. By 2015, in accordance with the MDGs, Turkey aims to provide primary education to all boys and girls in the country. Turkey has been making every effort to ensure that these children attend school.



**FIGURE 5** Girls and boys enrolled in school as a result of the campaign in Kirkkoyun, Diyarbakır. (Photo by Abdullah Çelik)

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### FURTHER READING

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