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The morning of October 9, 2012 was innocuous enough. The girls of the school in Mingora, Afghanistan took their exams then boarded the bus to head home. But as they rolled through the Swat Valley, with the girls singing and chatting happily in the back, a masked man boarded the bus. His hand shaking, he yelled, "Which one of you is Malala?" The girls were silent, but side glances gave her away. The man raised his gun and fired twice; the first bullet hit the 15 year old girl's shoulder, the second entered through her left temple and exited down her neck. As word of the attack spread, the world prayed for the survival of this girl who had stood up to oppression and said that girls also have the right to be educated.

Nelson Mandela understood that education could raise standards of living, prevent conflicts, and impact generations to come. Narrowing gender disparities in education extends this promise to girls; with that, education has the potential to change the world.

Today, 65 million girls across the world don't go to school, and of these, 17 million will most likely never go. A World Bank study found that every 1% increase in the proportion of women with secondary education boosted a country's annual per capita income growth rate by about 0.3%. Additionally, girls with an extra year of education can earn up to 20% more as adults, as compared to their uneducated counterparts. In the Sub-Saharan African country of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has the lowest per capita income in the world at just \$400 a year, the potential benefits of educated girls are substantial - both to the prosperity of families and to the country as a whole.

Furthermore, the social benefits of educating women cannot be ignored. Separate studies conducted in India and Bangladesh have found that as the rate of education among girls increases, incidents of domestic violence and female genital mutilation decrease. A 2001 study from UNESCO also reported that educated women were almost three times more likely than illiterate women to attend political meetings and be more involved in community decisions.

Most importantly, the investment in girls' education pays dividends. A 2011 UNESCO report showed that children of educated, literate mothers were twice as likely to survive past age five than those whose mothers were deprived of an education. Educated girls also tend to marry later, have 2.2 fewer children, and send their children to school at twice the rate of their uneducated peers. These statistics point to the fact that bringing 65 million more people into the educated fold of society can bring major social and economic benefits. But, perhaps it is best to leave with the story of Malala. After being shot in the head by the Taliban, she spent 10 days in a coma. But when she woke up, Malala vowed to continue to fight until every last girl had the opportunity to pursue their educational aspirations.