

HUFF
POST



One Story, One World
In partnership with **Johnson & Johnson**



[Rana Florida](#)

CEO, The Creative Class Group & Author, Upgrade

Girl Up! (VIDEO)

Posted: 03/04/2014 9:19 am EST Updated: 03/04/2014 11:59 am EST



Photo credit: Girl Up

March 8th marks [International Women's Day](#), a time to celebrate the tremendous gains that women have achieved, whether in access to reproductive health care and education or in their increasing visibility in the executive suites of corporations and at the top levels of governments. But it's also a day to acknowledge how much still needs to be done.

Here are some startling facts:

- In many developing countries, more than half of girls drop out of school before they reach the sixth grade.
- One in seven girls in the developing world (excluding China) will be married before the age of 15.
- Medical complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among girls ages 15-19 worldwide.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, 75 percent of HIV-infected youth between the ages of 15-24 are girls.
- Worldwide, nearly 50 percent of sexual assaults are committed against girls 15 years old or younger.
- Violence kills and disables as many women between the ages of 15-44 as cancer.

The most effective way to improve the lot of women is to educate girls. Every year of schooling increases a girl's potential future earnings by 10-20 percent. Girls with secondary educations are six times less likely to be married than those with no educations, and when they do marry, they will have less children and seek out better medical care for them. And since women and girls re-invest 90 percent of their income in their families and communities (compared to just 30-40 percent for men), an investment in their education provides benefits for everyone.



Aw Barre elementary school_two girls Photo credit: Girl Up

I went to the [United Nations Foundation](#) in New York City to meet with [Melissa Hilebrenner](#), the Director of Girl Up, a "for girls, by girls" campaign that mobilizes girls in the US to raise awareness and funds for UN programs that are targeted to adolescent girls in developing countries. She told me about the program's biggest challenges and its most gratifying successes.

Most importantly, she told me what you can do right now to help.



Follow Rana Florida on Twitter: www.twitter.com/ranaflorida