



The value of words is beyond the sum of their parts: they provide humans with the ability to care and to comfort, to hate and hurt. Each word also has the inbuilt capacity to act as an agent of development and human empowerment, easily unleashed by the world's literate population. For nearly 800 million people, however, the task is not as easy.

800 million adults are illiterate worldwide and two out of every three of them are female. The number of illiterate women thus exceeds the population of the European Union. The situation persists although literacy has a tremendous potential impact on women's lives.

Literate women have the possibility to share knowledge and be active in society. Literacy improves women's health: HIV/AIDS, for example, spreads twice as fast among illiterate women. In addition, not only do literate women have fewer children, they also tend to take better care of them. A baby born to a literate mother has a 50 per cent better chance of living to the age of five than one born to an illiterate mother.

GENDER AND HEALTH

915 deaths per **100,000** live births

High maternal mortality ratios in countries that record high levels of gender inequality

61 MILLION children of primary school age are not enrolled in school

1/2 of them are girls

THESE CHILDREN ARE LIKELY TO BECOME THE NEXT GENERATION OF ILLITERATES

"Every literate woman is a victory over poverty"
Ban Ki-moon

LITERATE/EDUCATED MOTHERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE INFORMED OF THE RISK OF HIV TRANSMISSION DURING PREGNANCY, LABOUR, DELIVERY AND BREASTFEEDING AS WELL AS PREVENTIVE MEASURES TO BE UNDERTAKEN.

Infographic by UNICEF, 2010. http://www.unicef.org/infobysites/index_01_01_10.shtml