



Promoting gender equality in education through mentoring

Reflecting on the experience of the Commonwealth Education Fund's Gender Equality in Education Project

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1. Introduction



1.1 Why is gender mainstreaming in education so important?

Addressing gender inequality is a crucial aspect of any development work. This is particularly the case with regards to education. Equal access to education is the foundation for all other development goals. Not only is it a fundamental right that should be available to all children, female and male, in order to give them the best possible chance of realising their potential and supporting themselves as independent adults, but also, a clear link has been established between educating girls and the future wellbeing of themselves and their families, socially, economically, and in terms of health. In recognition of this, while most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) face a deadline of 2015, the gender parity in education target (the third MDG) was set to be achieved a full ten years earlier.

Sadly, 2005 and the deadline for achieving the third MDG have passed, and 67 countries still have primary

school enrolment and attendance rates for girls that are lower than 85%. More significantly, the weakness, or even total absence, of gendered analysis and gender sensitive practices in education work at the policy and programme level means that the promotion of the rights of girls and boys in education through the transformation of power relations between them is often inadequately addressed. To put it another way, policy debates and official commitments to 'gender mainstreaming' in education have not translated into practical changes in the way that children are taught, and the values of those teaching them. This means that in many contexts, girls and boys continue to be taught using methods, and in environments, that reinforces and upholds gender inequality and negative gender stereotypes, rather than challenging them. Inevitably, this profoundly impacts on girls' experiences of school, lessening, or even negating the positive role that education can play in realising women's rights and reducing poverty.

Above: Peer mentoring.

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1.2 Gender mainstreaming in the Commonwealth Education Fund's programme

A mid-term review of the Commonwealth Education Fund's (CEF) programme to promote civil society input into the Education For All (EFA) process revealed a consistent failure to mainstream a gender analysis and gender sensitive practices into the programme's activities, despite a commitment to gender mainstreaming within the Fund's mandate. CEF partners and networks had been encouraged to take part in gender training workshops, but this had had little impact in the way that they then went on to carry out their activities. In response to this, the Gender Equality in Education Project was developed, with the idea of providing targeted support to partner organisations in four of the sixteen CEF countries. Developed within a very short timeframe, and with a narrow focus on four country programmes, the GEEP was, in retrospect, an extremely ambitious project.

Commonwealth Education Fund

The Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF) ran between 2002 and 2008, and was set up by the UK Department for International Development. It aimed to promote civil society input into the Education For All process, and raise the profile of international education targets in sixteen low-income Commonwealth countries in Africa and Asia. Jointly managed by ActionAid, Oxfam and Save the Children, the CEF also aimed to increase public debate around education goals, promote gender equality in education and focus on the needs of children outside the education system. The CEF had six objectives:

- To strengthen broad-based and democratically run national education coalitions
- To enable local voices and experiences to influence national-level policy and practice
- To ensure that sufficient financing is available to make public schools work for all girls and boys
- To ensure resources reach where they are most needed
- To promote innovative work and use the evidence from this experience to influence policy
- To bring all excluded children, particularly girls, into public schools.

In 2005, the CEF's mid-term review highlighted the need to mainstream gender in all its work – in project and partner assessment, in budgeting work and in looking at the exclusion of girls as it cuts across other categories of exclusion. The Gender Equality in Education Project (GEEP) was set up to achieve this, principally through the engagement of four gender mentors to work with partner organisations in the target countries.

To access further publications and resources on the GEEP project, please visit www.commonwealtheducationfund.org/GEEP.html

2. The Gender Equality in Education Programme (GEEP)



Malawi Gender Mentor, Esnath Kalyati providing support to the team to review gender on the CEF end of project evaluation format.

2.1 Aims

The GEEP was drawn up in close consultation with CEF country offices and partners, who revealed that people did not want yet more one-off gender training workshops, but rather ongoing support that would enable them to really grasp the concepts and terminology behind gender mainstreaming, and provide them with practical ideas to make their own activities more gender aware. CEF also recognised that for the project to have long-term impact and bring about real change in understandings and values around gender equality, a new approach that could provide responsive, sustained and consistent long-term support was needed. As such, the decision was taken to engage four gender mentors to work with partner organisations in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, and Bangladesh for the remaining two years of the CEF programme. These gender mentors would in turn be supported by CEF country offices, and by a Gender Project Manager, based in Oxfam's head office in the UK.

Mentoring, it was felt, would facilitate learning, enthusiasm, and confidence around gender issues, enabling partner organisations to: develop and implement their own, good quality, gender equitable strategies and plans; carry out high quality monitoring and evaluation work; and document the processes and outcomes of the mentoring project for learning and sharing. It was envisaged that mentors would work alongside partner organisations to identify which issues around gender mainstreaming they felt confident and familiar with, and which issues presented 'blockages', as well as identifying which training methods partners would find most useful. Activities would be led by

individual mentees within the partner organisation, with the mentor responding to their needs, working at their pace, and according to their priorities, and drawing on different strategies and training methods as appropriate.

2.2 What is mentoring?

The GEEP did not begin with any fixed idea of what the mentoring support should entail. Rather, in keeping with Oxfam's approach (used as the model for this project), mentoring was seen as a process, constantly evolving in response to the needs and priorities of the mentee; in this way, it was hoped that partner organisations would not feel that the project was being imposed upon them by the CEF. The mentors were not there to act as advisors – setting the agenda as to what the partners needed to do, and then providing the answers as to how they should do it – but rather as facilitators. This 'process support' aimed at gradually building up the capacity and competency of the partner organisation and its staff through a range of ongoing and linked activities.

It was important that mentors understood that theirs was a supportive rather than an advisory role. They were not there to instruct mentees, but rather to be responsive, 'hold their hands' and guide them towards developing their own strategies for mainstreaming gender into their activities and approach, through listening to their mentees during one-to-one and group discussions, providing appropriate training using a range of methods, and putting partner organisations in touch with other useful professional contacts, where applicable. Getting the balance right in this relationship proved to be one of the most challenging aspects of this project, as will be discussed below in section 5.

3. Implementing the GEEP

3.1 Identifying country programmes to participate

Four of the sixteen countries that were participating in the CEF programme were selected to take part in the GEEP – Malawi, Kenya, Ghana, and Bangladesh. Selection was on the basis of the results of a needs assessment to measure gaps in programming relating to gender, and with the aim of engaging with programmes that worked on different aspects of education and which were geographically diverse. In addition, CEF country coordinators and partner organisations in Malawi, Kenya and Ghana expressed positive interest in the project, and were very keen to take part. The case of Bangladesh was rather different. The Bangladesh country programme office was persuaded to take part in the GEEP, rather than volunteering, resulting in the sense that this was a project being imposed from outside. In addition, the country coordinator made it clear that mentoring to support gender mainstreaming would not be useful in the Bangladesh context, as the country had succeeded in achieving parity of enrolment between girls and boys in schools. This set-up meant that the mentor in Bangladesh faced particular challenges, which will be discussed in more detail below.

3.2 Bringing in the mentors

Potential mentors were identified and approached in consultation with gender and education experts in the four countries, and advisors and managers from the country programme officers of the three CEF organisations – ActionAid, Oxfam GB, and Save the Children. The four gender mentors selected were all highly experienced and qualified in their fields.

Identifying suitable mentors

The following attributes were considered to be important in a potential mentor:

- a substantial knowledge of broad gender issues as they relate to the work of the partner
- an existing network of contacts and professional relationships around gender and/or the area of work of the partner
- practical experience to which the partner can relate
- the capacity to be both an insider and outsider – the ability to engage and disengage with organisations as appropriate
- maturity and patience to both gain respect from the mentee but also to manage conflict
- a reasonable knowledge of both the mentee and any possible lead organisations involved.

Gender mentors were recruited in the four countries by the end of March 2007, and spent the next few months familiarising themselves with the work of the partners and assessing their existing capacity on gender, going through work plans with each partner organisation. Mentors went about this in different ways. For instance, in Malawi, a CEF monitoring and evaluation workshop for all the partner organisations took place shortly after the mentor was recruited. She took advantage of this opportunity to meet with the partner organisations and get to know them, and followed this up with visits to the offices of each organisation. In the process, the mentor identified what areas partners wished to work on with her, and which gaps in their understanding of gender issues were presenting the most pressing obstacles to their capacity to mainstream gender in their work.

Partners then identified one objective from each of their work plans for which they felt they would need mentoring support if their work to mainstream gender was to have real impact.

Kenya

The three CEF partner organisations working in Kenya – the Girl Child Network, the Elimu Yeti Coalition, and the Kenya National Association of Parents and Teachers (KNAP) requested support to develop advocacy programmes on four themes: managing the process of sexual maturation among girls and boys; gender-responsive teaching methods and school environments; gender sensitive school curricula; and gender-based violence.

Ghana

The Northern Network for Education Development (NNED) and the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition (GNECC) decided that they wanted to concentrate on two key areas in their work with the mentor: challenging cultural practices that limit girls' opportunities to go to school, and the lack of women teachers in rural areas.

Malawi

Working with four partner organisations and two ministries – the Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education (CSCQBE),

A group mentoring session between the Bangladesh Gender Mentor and the CEF Asia team.



the Synod of Lingingstonia, Trans World Radio, and FAWEMA, and the ministries of Finance, and Education, Women and Children's Affairs – the gender mentor supported activities on gender budget monitoring. The aim was to bring about increased financial allocation to the education sector.

Bangladesh

As the CEF country coordinator did not feel that mentoring to support gender mainstreaming was necessary in the Bangladesh context, the objective here was to support three partners to conduct research on how the country had succeeded in reaching gender parity in school enrolment, and how this could be sustained.

3.3 Developing work plans

Each mentor went on to develop different work plans to fit in with the needs of the partner organisations with which she was working.

In Malawi, the mentor conducted a training workshop on gender budgeting issues, during which it became apparent that many participants did not have enough knowledge of gender issues more generally to be able to benefit from the training. As a result, the mentor adapted her plans for the workshop, spending two days introducing the participants to concepts relating to gender and gender mainstreaming, before moving on to explore gender budgeting. She followed this up with visits to each organisation, where she spent time helping mentees put the gender budgeting tools they had acquired in the workshop into practice.

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CEF Gender Project Manager, Oley Dibba-Wadda and Ghana Gender Mentor, Clara Fayorsey providing support to reflect gender in the work of the CEF Coordinators in West Africa.

The mentor in Ghana worked with two national coalitions, but as district level organising was more coordinated than at the national level, the mentor focussed her work at the district level. This presented some logistical difficulties, as the coalitions were at opposite ends of the country. In addition, staff changes at the CEF country office left the mentor with no clear management structure, which had a negative impact on her capacity to carry out the role, and on her relationship with the partner organisations. This eventually led the contracting of a new mentor, who was able to re-establish an effective working relationship with the two coalitions, and in particular, worked effectively with the coalition based in the north of the country.

In Kenya, the gender mentor's initial impressions of the partners suggested that two out of the three were not interested in working on gender issues. As such, she began by holding a large meeting to discuss mentoring and the process of promoting gender equality. Though the partners came with a certain resistance, after the mentor spent time explaining that promoting gender equality was not a new project needing new money, but just a way of better understanding and carrying out existing programme work, attitudes began to change, and staff in the partner organisations came to accept that work on gender does not need to be confrontational. This meeting also allowed the mentor time to informally assess the partners, understand the different issues they worked on, and develop ways of providing effective support.

The mentor then went on to develop work plans with each organisation, working with one to support the development of a gender audit process, and at another providing mentoring training on sexual maturation for those working with adolescents.

Unfortunately, the mentor in Bangladesh was unable to establish an effective working relationship with the partner organisations, meaning that she was unable to support them in carrying out research into how the country had achieved gender parity in school enrolment. As a result, the mentor ended up producing a detailed report herself, based on desk research.

Case study: mentoring the Kenyan National Association of Parents (KNAP)

KNAP is a national body that brings together all the parent and teacher associations in Kenya. Its main mandate is to monitor how government funds are used in schools. When the mentor began to work with the organisation, gender was not an issue that KNAP had taken on board. The first meeting with the secretary general reflected a general ignorance about gender issues. He was, however, willing to learn how gender could be a part of KNAP's work. KNAP was in the process of recruiting monitors to work at the community level to monitor the implementation of government educational policies. The mentor identified the work of these new monitors as a solid entry point for integrating gender analysis into KNAP's activities.

The first step involved getting the monitors (spread around the country) to attend the initial gender group mentoring session. Fifteen monitors attended the session, at which the mentor helped participants to explore and reflect on gender concepts and gender inequality. She then went on to focus on the key gender issues that needed to be monitored in Kenyan schools. Although each region had different issues (lack of sanitary facilities for girls, lack of female teachers, boys leaving school to find work in tourism, girl child marriages) cultural practices, poverty and a lack of leadership were seen to be the major causes of gender inequalities across the country. The monitors embraced what they had learned in the session, and decided to carry out gender audits on their return to identify the key issues in their schools. It was agreed that they would all meet with the mentor again after three months to discuss their findings and decide a way forward. The mentor continued to support the monitors through telephone conversations over the intervening months, as many needed support around understanding particular gender issues as they arose.

The review session was held three months later. From the monitors' personal experiences of collecting the data they created a new gender aware 'monitoring form' that each could use to monitor the schools they visited. These new forms included all the gender issues that should be checked in schools, and the reports compiled were then fed back to the Ministry of Education.

The mentor noted that it was clear the attitudes and practices of the monitors had changed dramatically. They were now able to appreciate that girls and boys faced different challenges in education, and that even when these challenges were the same, girls and boys were often affected differently.

In addition to school monitoring KNAP also undertakes radio and TV work, through which they raise awareness of education matters. The mentor agreed with KNAP that these media briefs should promote gender equality, and she supported them in doing so by providing intensive group mentoring sessions on media gender advocacy skills.

4. What worked?



One-to-one mentoring.

At a meeting held in the UK in June 2008, the mentors and the Gender Project Manager came together to discuss their experiences. Overall, there was a strong sense among the mentors and the project manager that many of the original intentions of the project had been realised, although the project in Bangladesh remained the exception to this. So what did the GEEP achieve, and which elements of their project activities 'worked', as far as the mentors were concerned?

4.1 Achievements

Changing attitudes

The three mentors from Malawi, Kenya, and Ghana all noted that over the course of the project, attitudes towards gender issues and their relevance to programme activities among staff of the partner organisations had begun to shift. In Kenya, the mentor reported that partners who had no previous understanding of gender, or considered it to be something only relating to girls and their welfare now felt confident and comfortable talking about gender, for instance in radio interviews. They also accepted the need for more nuanced gender analysis in their work, considering the needs of males as well as females,

and this was being reflected in advocacy documents and activities. In Malawi, partner organisations felt the mentor's support had strengthened their capacity to incorporate gender analysis into their work, with one partner reporting that:

*"... we have been part of the NGOs that conducted a gender budgeting and monitoring exercise in schools within Zomba district using a questionnaire. The mentor helped us to review the questionnaire to take into account more gender issues so that next time we can do the exercise better. [...] The GEEP mentor has greatly added value to the whole planning system and we are now able to seriously look at issues with gender lens within and outside the organization."
(GEEP Evaluation Report, p. 18).*

The mentor in Ghana felt that by the end of the project, partners had a much better understanding of the socio-cultural construction of gender and gender inequalities, and were also openly questioning activities labelled 'gender' but which only targeted girls, noting the 'backlash' that this often produced among boys who felt that they were being sidelined. She reported that partners had begun to develop their own creative

strategies for bringing about change, such as tabling bylaws to prevent girls being taken out of school for long periods of time.

In all three contexts, mentors reported that partner organisations were now making deliberate efforts to ensure gender is raised in their discussions with education authorities at all levels, and now felt confident to discuss gender issues openly in national and local forums.

Influencing district and national government

One of the objectives agreed for the mentoring work in Malawi and in Kenya was that it would support partners to carry out monitoring of budget and resource allocation at school, district and national level. The mentor in Malawi felt that she had had considerable success in this, particularly at the national level, in part because her connections and willingness to engage with government officials in a non-confrontational way had meant that partners and ministry officials had come together to work on gender mainstreaming education budgets. As a result, partners had come together to draw up guidelines on gender budget monitoring which were endorsed by the Ministry of Finance; a forum for continued and sustained

dialogue had been established involving the CEF partners and relevant ministries; and the ministries of gender and finance were working together on mainstreaming gender into budgeting, as a result of their involvement in the GEEP. As a result, changes to finance ministry guidelines on budgeting for all ministries, including education, meant that ministry budgets for 2009-10 were developed using gender budgeting processes.

In Kenya, the mentor reported that accessible policy documents on gender budget monitoring had been distributed at district level, raising awareness and building interest in the issue; she noted that this had a 'multiplier effect' up to ministries at government level, who were now showing a greater interest in working on gender issues in education.

Building strong relationships

All three mentors reported that one of the most important outcomes of the project was the establishment of strong working relationships, between the mentor and the partners, and among the partner organisations and agencies. The mentor in Malawi felt that the network of the six partners and government bodies with whom she worked had really been strengthened as a result of the mentoring

Case study: increasing Ghanaian girls' school attendance through bylaws

In northern Ghana, the Northern Network for Education Development (NNED) district Education For All teams have been working in communities and schools to address cultural practices that directly impact upon girls' school attendance.

- Fostering practices have serious implications for young girls who are sent to stay with relatives, particularly their paternal aunts, as household helps. They are often expected to work extremely hard from dawn to dusk, or are sent out to work as street traders. Frequently, they are not allowed to go to school.
- Funerals in northern Ghana can last up to two or three months. During this period, people move and stay with the bereaved families to keep them company during the mourning period, and take their children, particularly girls, with them. During this time the children help with chores and errands and do not go to school.
- In some parts, young girls are kidnapped by men or their families, and taken to the man's village. They are then made pregnant and messages are sent to the girl's family to inform them that they have their daughter who is pregnant and that marriage arrangements should be made. Once married, the girl is unable to return to school.

Through creating awareness of the impacts of these practices on girls' education, as well as by working with communities to develop responses to these practices, the NNED teams have influenced attitudes in these communities. For example, the House of chiefs in Tamale has established bylaws to prevent children, particularly girls, from being taken out of school for the above practices.

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Case study: sensitising school management committees to gender issues in Malawi

The Synod of Livingstonia was involved in strengthening community participation in both the management of schools and the monitoring of education resources at Kalowe and Chisenga, in Chitipa, northern Malawi.

Through working with the gender mentor they developed both their capacity and confidence in promoting gender equality. For example, the Synod of Livingstonia was specifically involved in working with school management committees (SMCs) to monitor the distribution of resources and their impact in schools, training them to use gender-monitoring tools. The Synod also proactively engaged in discussions with the members of these committees (as well as parents more generally) on the impact of traditional gender relations and expectations on girls' educational attainment.

Early marriage and expectations that girls would carry out domestic chores were topics discussed with communities, and they were the issues specifically addressed by the new monitoring tools. At the end of the GEEP, the organisation was already starting to see the impact of its work in the communities. Through monitoring who is doing domestic chores in school hostels, the communities realised that girls were overburdened and this affected their work at school. In response to this, the SMCs took action to split the chores between boys and girls. Furthermore, awareness raising around early marriage resulted in a drop in such marriages in the communities, and a decrease in the removal of young girls from schools.

project; she and all the partners had expressed their desire to continue the mentoring and collaborative relationship into the future, as both sides felt that they had gained considerably from the experience.

Meanwhile, the mentor in Ghana reported that she had been able to identify 'champions' within the partner organisations who were keen to continue with the work that she had begun with them; she was pleased that she had been able to use her personal contacts to provide opportunities for these champions to develop new networks for future activities. Building strong relationships with partners was, it was agreed, the best way to encourage commitment to the project, and enthusiasm for the concept of mentoring itself, and the benefits that it could bring to the partner organisation. The fact that mentors and partners were keen to continue the mentoring relationship beyond the cessation of the CEF indicates that positive changes brought about by mentoring in partners on gender will be sustained in the long term.

4.2 Successful ways of working

Focusing on one issue

Both the mentor in Malawi and the mentor in Kenya felt that working with partner organisations on one specific issue and / or activity was beneficial for both sides. For instance, focusing on supporting partners to develop skills to carry out gender budgeting and monitoring meant that the mentor in Malawi was able to develop a targeted approach with more readily achievable outcomes that could be appreciated by the partners.

Flexibility

All three mentors recognised how important it was to be flexible, both in terms of the amount of time and



energy they put into the project, and in responding to the partners' changing needs and priorities. At the reflection meeting, the mentors and the Gender Project Manager agreed that for a project like this to be successful, the mentor really had to go beyond a '9-5 attitude', and accept that the role would involve considerable travel, as well as the need to stay in regular telephone communication with partners. In terms of responding to partners' needs, the mentors agreed that a mentor needed to have a wide range of training strategies – from observing and assessing partners' activities to providing workshop training – at her disposal, as well as the time and the patience to listen to individual staff members and respond to their concerns and queries at an individual level. As the mentor from Kenya

commented, the mentor must also accept that much of this 'behind the scenes' work will remain invisible, and may not be formally acknowledged.

'Value added'

It was recognised that mentors have to have something to offer partners, beyond a listening ear or targeted training, that will make it worth the partner's while to take part in the project. This could be extensive personal contacts, such as those of the mentor in Ghana, or previous experience of working in national government, which is what the mentor in Malawi was able to bring to the project in both cases, this meant that the mentor was able to facilitate the establishment of new working relationships between the partner organisation and other agencies, to the benefit of the partner's future activities.

[Girls peer mentoring.](#)

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5. Challenges



Kenya Gender Mentor, Nyokabi Kamau providing group mentoring support.

As the discussion above indicates, this project did achieve some significant and important outcomes which, provided they can be sustained and the partner organisations remain committed to mainstreaming a gender analysis into their work, should have long term, positive impact on the education of girls and boys in the communities where the partners are working. However, the project was limited in what it could achieve in such a short period of time, in addition to which all four mentors faced considerable challenges in adapting to this new way of working, encouraging partner organisations to engage with the project, and overcoming various logistical difficulties.

5.1 Adapting to a new way of working

As discussed above in section 2, the GEEP did not begin with a fixed idea of what the mentoring support should entail; rather, mentoring was seen as a process, constantly evolving in response to the changing needs and priorities of the partner organisation. While in principle, this was an admirable approach, and one that might have worked very well in a project with a much longer time frame (giving both

partner and mentor adequate time to allow the relationship to evolve and develop), in practice, it left both mentors and partner organisations rather confused as to what the role of the mentor should be. As the mentor from Kenya remarked:

“Since there lacked a clear understanding of the mentor’s role in the first three months, there was confusion as to what I was to do – hence for most of the time, partners expected me to work for them.”
(GEEP Evaluation Report, p. 19).

As a result, it was very easy for mentors to fall into the role of advisor, or consultant, (a role with which they were all very familiar), there to provide analysis, build capacity, fill gaps in knowledge, or implement ‘the gender element’, resulting in their feeling overburdened with demands on their time that they could not meet in the two days a week that they had to carry out their mentoring activities. It was just as easy for partners to accept this kind of support, and to let the mentor ‘do the work for them’. This was particularly the case with the first mentor contracted in Ghana, who, partly as a result of lack of managerial support from the CEF

country office, very much put herself in the position of advisor, there to instruct the partners with whom she was working, rather than supporting them to think through themselves how the issues that they faced were shaped by gender. It is probably fair to say that the CEF underestimated how much support the mentors would need themselves to carry out this kind of work, or the extent to which prior experience of mentoring, or of being mentored, might have enabled the mentors to adapt to their role in this project more easily.

Four months into the project, an interactive learning session was organised, bringing together the four mentors, the CEF Africa Regional Co-ordinator, and staff from the CEF UK secretariat, including the Gender Project Manager. This was the first time that the mentors were able to meet, and to discuss what it meant to be a mentor with each other, CEF staff, and a facilitator who had considerable experience of mentoring herself. At the end of the session, the mentors went away with a much clearer idea of what mentoring entails, and, perhaps more significantly, were able to go back to their partners with an informal 'contract' outlining their own duties and responsibilities to the organisations. This helped considerably in clarifying the relationship between the mentor and the partner and, as discussed above, in two cases in particular (Kenya and Malawi), the mentors went on to develop successful mentoring relationships with their partner organisations. Clearly, ensuring that both mentors and partners had a thorough understanding of what mentoring entailed would have helped the GEEP 'get of the ground' more successfully from the outset.

5.2 Encouraging partner organisations to engage with the GEEP

In all four-country contexts, the project faced difficulties in introducing and integrating this new approach to supporting gender mainstreaming into existing CEF and partner activities. One reason for this was that by the time that the mentoring project began, partners had already been involved with the CEF programme for over two years, and had already developed their own agendas and work plans; it was not easy for the mentors to find an 'entry point' from which they could begin to provide mentoring support, without seeming to disrupt the work that the partners were already doing. It also, in some cases, meant that the mentor was unwilling to challenge the way some of the partner organisations were carrying out their activities; for instance, in Ghana the first mentor did not challenge the fact that one partner's activities were exclusively focused on girls, and that this was having a very negative effect on gender relations between girls and boys in that community, with boys deliberately trying to get girls pregnant because they felt excluded.

Mentors also faced difficulties initially in getting themselves, and the gender mainstreaming support that they were trying to provide, taken seriously by the partners. This was particularly difficult in situations where the mentor did not feel that she had the support of the CEF country office, as this meant she had less legitimacy in the eyes of the partners, and that they were less interested in working with her, as they could not see how her presence and the support she was offering fitted in with the other CEF activities. In addition, several of the partner organisations were initially hostile to the very idea of working on gender,

seeing it as irrelevant to their activities. In some cases, male leaders of partner organisations were openly sexist towards the mentor, belittling her and her work. Again, the failure of CEF country offices to explain exactly why partners were being offered this support, and how participating in the GEEP would benefit them in the long run, contributed to this feeling that the mentors lacked legitimacy. Further down the line, mentors found that partners were reluctant to put the time into documenting their work with the mentor, meaning that, as the mentor in Ghana pointed out, valuable learning was lost. Again, this could be the result of an overall lack of engagement with the project and its aims, and a failure to see how the work that they were doing with the mentor would be important in the long term to the future activities of the organisation.

Sadly, the mentor in Bangladesh was never able to establish an effective working relationship with the partner organisations. To begin with, the CEF country co-ordinator openly distanced the GEEP from the CEF programme, meaning that the mentor felt isolated and disempowered both within the CEF and in her relationship with the partners. This was partly because while the other countries that took part in the GEEP had volunteered to do so, the CEF country office in Bangladesh had been approached and asked to take part. As a result, the country co-ordinator may have felt that the GEEP had been imposed upon him, making him reluctant to champion the project. In addition, the partner organisations were all male-dominated, and were openly hostile to the mentor and what she was trying to achieve. The wider context in Bangladesh does need to be taken into account here – the country's success in meeting the third MDG in achieving

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gender parity in school enrolment meant that for NGOs working on education issues, gender (understood as parity in enrolment) was no longer seen as a priority in their work. For this reason, the partners invited to take part really did not see how what the mentor was trying to achieve was relevant to their work, even though she was contracted to work with them to explore how the country had been so successful in increasing school enrolment among girls (and boys), rather than to provide gender mainstreaming support. In addition, the CEF programme was coming to an end in Bangladesh, meaning that partners were bringing their CEF activities to a close; again, this gave them little incentive to engage with the GEEP. These factors combined to mean that all in all, the project in Bangladesh was not a success.

5.3 Logistics

The GEEP was, on reflection, an extremely ambitious project, both in its goal of altering deep-seated attitudes around gender equality so quickly, and in what it thought the mentors could achieve in such a short space of time, and working two days a week. The mentors in Kenya and Ghana both expressed frustration at the limited amount of time that they were contracted to spend on the project, with the mentor in Kenya reflecting that, working part time on the project, she did not feel able to deliver against the monitoring and evaluation outputs or to give the partner organisations what they needed. The mentor in Ghana worked with two different coalitions in different regions of the country: providing mentoring support to both on a two-day a week contract was practically impossible, meaning that in the end, the mentor worked more extensively

with one of the two coalitions than with the other. In both cases, a more realistic assessment of what the mentor could achieve in terms of support at the outset of the project would have avoided this feeling of frustration on the part of the mentors, as well as giving the partners a better idea of what they could realistically expect to gain from participating. In addition, it would be fair to say that the sustained changes in deep-seated attitudes around gender inequality envisaged by the project designers could really only be brought about over a much longer timeframe than that allowed by the GEEP. Integrating mentoring support for gender mainstreaming into the CEF programme from the very beginning could have resulted in mentors being better placed to deliver against the targets set in the monitoring and evaluation framework, as well as giving them, and the partners, more of an opportunity to settle into this new way of working, and establish effective working relationships.

Another logistical issue that impacted on the capacity of the mentors to carry out their role effectively was high staff turnover within the CEF country offices; this was particularly an issue in Ghana and Malawi. This meant that the mentors did not receive consistent managerial support from the CEF country coordinators, and were often left unsure as to whom to report to. In the case of the first mentor contracted in Ghana, this had a significant negative impact on the quality of her work. While the Gender Project Manager did provide lengthy telephone support to the mentors, her geographical distance meant that she was not able to provide day-to-day support of the kind that might have helped the mentors to adapt to this new way of working more quickly.

6. Some reflections on what makes for a good mentoring project



One-to-one peer mentoring.

It is important to note that this was a small-scale project, both in terms of timescale and geographical reach. The discussion below is not meant to serve as a definitive ‘guide to mentoring’, but rather, draws together the mentors’ own reflections on what factors they feel would contribute to a successful mentoring scheme.

6.1 Who makes a good mentor?

In reflecting on their experience of mentoring, the mentors all agreed that mentoring is not an activity that should be taken on lightly, in any capacity. Choosing the right mentor for a particular project needs to be a careful process, taking into account what the partner organisation hopes to gain from mentoring, and what the would-be mentor can offer.

It is a role that requires certain skills and attributes – some generic, such as good communication skills, the ability to put people at ease and inspire confidence, and maturity, and some specific to the project in question, such as knowledge and experience of working on the particular issues that a partner is concerned with, and the capacity to bring the partner organisation into contact with individuals, networks, and agencies that it would not otherwise have been able to access. In the GEEP, substantive knowledge of issues around gender and education was clearly essential. But so was having a network of professional contacts, an appreciation of power relations within the political, social, and cultural context in which the partner works, and knowledge and understanding

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CEF Africa Regional Coordinator, Emily Lugano, facilitating a team work exercise to the CEF Coordinators.

of the partner's area of work, as well as practical examples relating to this area of work that that partner could relate to and perhaps integrate into their own activities. For instance, for the partners involved in the GEEP in Malawi, the mentor's experience of working within government and her personal contacts in the ministries who were invited to take part in the gender budgeting exercise were just as important as her skills and experience of working on gender budgeting.

Mentoring also demands long-term commitment, a great deal of flexibility, and a willingness to work with the people who are being mentored, responding to their needs, and adapting activities to provide them with the right kind of support at the right time, rather than seeing oneself as an advisor, there to impart wisdom to the partner. The mentors agreed that anyone taking on this role had to be willing to think of it as extending beyond the '9-5' working day, and to be prepared to keep in regular telephone communication with partners, and travel to spend time with them.

As the mentor in Ghana pointed out, the need to travel to spend time with partners is a significant demand on the mentor, and one that she found difficult to meet, given the physical distance between the two coalitions she was working with. The mentors also felt that it was important to establish an 'insider-outsider' location within the partner organisation, earning the trust and respect of the individuals working there, while still being in a position to rise above, and manage, conflict; all agreed that patience and maturity were key attributes in this regard, as well as the ability to manage multiple relationships within and outside the partner organisations. In all these areas, good communication skills and the ability to establish relationships of trust were seen as key.

Mentoring activities

The mentors who had taken part in the GEEP agreed that mentoring involves a wide range of different activities. These might include:

- Initial needs assessment
- One-to-one and group training to build capacity on gender issues
- Workshops
- Field visits
- Providing targeted support to individuals, including offering a 'listening ear' if that is all that is desired
- Imputing into key documents
- Advising over the phone, via email, and in person
- Putting partners in touch with other organisations, networks, and individuals
- Developing advocacy
- Supporting partners to conduct research and analysis
- Responding to requests for information
- Conducting ongoing evaluation and assessment of the project, in order to feed back into the mentoring process.

6.2 What needs to be in place for a mentoring scheme to work?

The success of a mentoring project does not just rely on picking the right person to provide mentoring support. Just as important is picking the right partner organisation to receive that support, ensuring that the environment in which the mentor will be working is supportive, and managing expectations on both sides.

Where is mentoring support appropriate?

If it is to have any sustainable impact, mentoring support for gender mainstreaming should only be offered to organisations that actively want to receive it. This may seem an obvious point, but is one that does not seem to have been taken into account in deciding which organisations should participate in the GEEP. As detailed above, this resulted in a very difficult situation for the mentor contracted to

work in Bangladesh, but it also created considerable extra work for the other mentors involved in the project, all of whom faced some level of resistance from some, or all of the partners with whom they worked. Of course, within any organisation, there will be individuals who are reluctant to accept that gender has anything to do with their work, and part of the mentor's role is to try and change such attitudes, as well as identifying 'gender champions' who will take the work forward after the mentor's formal engagement with the organisation has ceased. But this is rather different from the mentor having to deal with open hostility on the part of the leadership of the organisation, as the mentor in Bangladesh faced. The mentor in Kenya reported that she also came up against the 'charismatic' national-level leader of one of the partners with whom she worked, who was not at all interested in accepting the partner's support in developing gender budgeting within the

organisation. The mentor got around this by working directly with regional-level chapters of the organisation, but this initial refusal to engage on the part of the organisation's leader was hardly an ideal start to the project; in addition, it is questionable how sustainable the introduction of gender budgeting at the regional level will be, given the lack of support from the organisation's leadership.

All the mentors also agreed that mentoring is far more successful and results in more tangible positive results when partners agree to work with the mentor on a specific issue, or task, such as introducing gender budgeting (in the case of the GEEP in Kenya and Malawi). In this case, the mentor is able to offer targeted support, with an agreed outcome in mind, meaning that both mentor and mentee have a clear idea the destination they are trying to reach. The mentors based in Kenya and Ghana also pointed out the importance of ensuring

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that partners invited to participate in mentoring have at least a basic level of capacity in terms of complying with reporting requirements, to ensure that important learning around the mentoring project is not lost.

Creating an enabling environment

Another thing to consider, in addition to the commitment of the organisation to receiving mentoring support, is whether or not the wider environment is conducive to enabling the success of the mentoring scheme. This enabling environment extends beyond the direct relationship between the mentor and the mentee, to encompass the level to which the mentoring scheme is integrated into the partner and lead agency's wider programme, the political environment in which the partner organisation is operating, and whether or not communication and transport infrastructure are well developed enough to allow the mentor to maintain regular contact with partner organisations who may be scattered across a wide area. To a greater or lesser extent, all four of the mentors involved in the GEEP felt that the project was not really properly integrated into the CEF's wider activities, mainly as a result of it being introduced so late into the programme. Where CEF country co-ordinators were supportive, as in the case of the project in Malawi, this did not significantly jeopardise the success of the scheme, but where there was open hostility towards the GEEP on the part of the CEF co-ordinator, as was the case in Bangladesh, implementing the GEEP proved to be impossible. Ensuring that the mentor receives consistent managerial support is also an important enabling factor, and one that is closely linked to how well integrated the mentoring scheme is within the lead agency's wider programme, and whether or not it is seen as a priority.

Measuring the impact of a mentoring scheme

The mentors suggested the following as examples of realistic indicators:

- Internal and external documentation produced by the partners consistently includes an understanding of gender, asks critical/key questions around gender, and provides answers that work to transform gender relations
- Projects and programmes address issues around the equal participation of men, women, boys, and girls
- Partners develop/implement activities that work specifically on gender issues
- Language on gender is adopted and used with enthusiasm by partner
- Partners desire to replicate and continue with the mentoring relationship

In the longer term, possible additional achievements were identified as:

- Policy environment starts to shift
- Changes in attitudes and beliefs occur in the communities

The wider political environment can also affect the mentor's capacity to carry out her role, both in terms of political support to the promotion of gender equality, and in terms of the level of freedom for civil society organising, and political stability. For instance, the gender budgeting carried out in Malawi and Kenya had the promotion of links and coordination between CSOs and local and national government bodies as one of its main aims. A project like that would not be successful in an environment where there is hostility on the part of the state towards civil society and restrictions on NGO activity, and / or a total lack of political will to address gender inequality. Likewise, as the mentor in Bangladesh found, trying to provide mentoring support on gender is very difficult in a political environment where gender mainstreaming is no longer seen as a priority, because the problem of gender inequality in education has officially been 'solved'. There is of course no way that the GEEP could have planned for the political unrest that swept through Kenya in early 2008, making it impossible for the partners

with whom the mentor was working to continue with their programmes, and forcing the mentor to reduce the range of her activities to working on media training with just one of the partners. However, it is important to bear in mind the extent to which external political factors can impact on the capacity of the mentor to carry out her role.

Managing expectations

One of the most significant lessons to come out of the GEEP was the importance of managing expectations, in terms of what support the mentor should realistically be asked to provide in the time available, what the partner can expect to gain from involvement in the project, and what impact the mentoring support will have on the attitudes and practices of those active within the partner organisations. It is fair to say that on all three counts, the GEEP was somewhat over-optimistic in what it thought could be achieved in such a relatively short space of time, and with mentors only contracted to work two days a week.

At the outset of the GEEP, there was a desire not to impose a fixed definition

A good mentor should encourage mentees to question their beliefs and values and find solutions to address what ever challenges these values and beliefs.



of what the mentoring support should consist of. While this is admirable from the perspective of encouraging the partner organisations to feel that they 'owned' the project, and could decide for themselves what sort of support they needed, and where, it in fact left both sides rather confused as to what they were supposed to be doing. As discussed above in section 5, this led to several of the mentors initially taking on the more traditional role of advisor. On reflection, all the mentors were of the opinion that the early stages of the project would have been easier if both mentor and mentee had a clear idea of scope and limitations of the mentor's relationship with the mentee. Once established, this would

then make it possible to develop a clear strategy and plan of action as to what could be achieved within the limits of that relationship, and in the time available.

Moving on to what can realistically be achieved over the course of a short-term mentoring scheme to support gender mainstreaming, the mentors who took part in the GEEP agreed that mentoring is just one part of a long term process of institutional change and cannot readily or easily be related to the specific impact that partner activities have within society in the long term. That said, it is important to identify some indicators that the mentor, partner, and lead agency can use to measure the impact of the mentoring on the partner's activities.

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6.3 Supporting the mentor

Finally, in designing a mentoring scheme to support gender mainstreaming, it is extremely important to consider what support will be available to the mentors themselves. All the mentors who took part in the GEEP were extremely experienced and knowledgeable on gender issues in education, but all found it difficult to adapt to this new way of working with partner organisations, rather than providing advice and leadership to them. In this way, they needed considerable mentoring support themselves, in addition to day-to-day managerial support, something that the Gender Project Manager was able to provide. This included face-to-face meetings as often as the GPM was able to travel to countries participating in the scheme, and frequent teleconferences. In addition, the mentors stayed in regular contact with each other, which also provided a valuable means of sharing ideas and resources, and providing 'peer support'. Having the chance to meet and discuss their reflections on the project at the three meetings held for the mentors over the course of the two years was also identified as very important in allowing the mentors to gain some perspective on their work, and in boosting morale.

What support do mentors need?

The mentors involved in the GEEP came up with the following examples of what support they benefited from over the course of the project.

- The key for the GEEP team was ongoing and regular review and reflection. These reviews became key turning points, enabling the mentors to adapt and develop their working practices as the GEEP progressed.
- The mentors and gender project manager kept personal diaries highlighting their high and low points, and identifying what went wrong and why.
- Mentors and the GPM came together as a team to identify strategies. Mentors felt that working together as a team (as one family on a mission to promote gender equality in education through mentoring) was their greatest strength and prevented individual mentors feeling that they were expected to 'have all the answers'.
- Regular communication with each other, sharing lessons, reports, plans and strategies was another strategy. This made the mentors feel that they were not alone in this quest, and helped to create a stronger bond within the team. It also meant that learning was shared within the team.
- Bi-weekly teleconferences with the GPM helped the mentors to express some of the frustrations they were experiencing, and work out how to resolve them.

7. Conclusion

In the three locations where the mentors were able to forge positive working relationships with partner organisations, feedback from those partners, and from the mentors themselves, indicates that the project was beginning to bring about positive change in people's attitudes towards gender equality, and the need to integrate a gender analysis into their work. As a result, those working in the partner organisations were beginning to feel more confident talking about gender and using it as a frame of analysis in their work. They had also begun to come up with their own innovative ways of trying to redress gender inequality and discrimination against women and girls in education in the communities in which they worked (such as drawing up bylaws against oppressive cultural practices in Ghana, and designing and using monitoring forms to record the distribution of domestic tasks in schools in Malawi, as discussed above). It is hoped that these new ways of working indicate shifts in attitude, and will have positive outcomes for the children in these communities. There are also positive indications that the gender 'champions' that mentors identified within the partner organisations will go on to provide mentoring support themselves to their colleagues, initially with ongoing informal support from the original mentors. This means that positive shifts in attitude are more likely to be sustained and replicated throughout the organisations, although it will be necessary to revisit the partner organisations in a few years time to see whether this is the case. So while the project's limited timescale and geographical reach mean that it would be wrong to make any wider claims in terms of its impact, these outcomes do indicate that this type of targeted mentoring support could be one means of bringing about sustainable changes in attitudes



around gender equality and facilitating gender mainstreaming, in combination with other forms of support and training. But as the mentors involved in the GEEP reflected, key to the future success of similar schemes would be the successful integration of a mentoring scheme into any gender mainstreaming project from the very beginning, with full managerial support, adequate resources and time allocated to the mentor, and clear links made between the mentor's role and the organisation's wider programme.

The decision to offer prolonged support in the form of mentoring over one-off gender training workshops represents an important shift in attitude on the part of the CEF and the lead agencies involved, and a recognition that gender mainstreaming is a complex process that cannot happen over night. Rather, if partners are to 'do' gender mainstreaming properly – and more importantly, to do it confidently, and in a way that makes sense to them – they need to be provided with sustained support that helps them to come to their own conclusions and develop their own strategies for integrating gender analysis into their work.

A mentor's most valuable skills are listening more and speaking less.

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