

Standing Up **Against** Marginalization: Stories across the Field

Reflections from the Chair

Chemba Raghavan, Chair, East Asia and Pacific Regional UNGEI

The Incheon Declaration at the World Education Forum held in the Republic of Korea in May 2015 prioritizes girls' education and gender equity. It affirms that all children, girls and boys, have the right to education. Educating girls also delivers huge social and economic benefits to the individual, her community and country. Positive trends are being seen across the East Asia and Pacific region in terms of gender equality in education with significant progress in narrowing the gender gap. Yet disaggregated data reveal substantial disparities within countries. In the diverse EAP region, various groups are marginalised due to language, culture, ethnicity, geographic location or wealth disparities, and being a girl often means they need to stand up against another layer of marginalisation. The recent report on *The Twin Challenges of Child Labour and Educational Marginalisation in the East and South-East Asia Regions*, highlights "mainstreaming gender considerations to account for the special vulnerabilities of female children and adolescents" as one of the key policy priorities. In this issue of the newsletter, we look into members' work helping girls 'stand up against marginalization' in education.



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Protecting girl street children in Cambodia through education

Aide et Action Cambodia

(Names and locations have been changed to protect the identity of children at risk)

“I am from Tbong Kmum,” says Sopea, a 13 year old girl from Cambodia. “My parents are divorced and first I lived with my father. He used to beat me. I could go to school and I was in grade 4, but it was difficult. I worked in the rice fields and I also picked lotus leaves out of the pond so my father could sell them.” Like many adolescent girls in Cambodia, Sopea had household obligations. She was in grade 4 until she dropped out of school to join her mother in Phnom Penh. She then worked with her sister in the streets: “I sold fried potatoes and fried chicken.”

According to the 2001 national survey led by a NGO called Mith Samlanh (MS), between 10,000 and 20,000 children work in the streets in Cambodia - among them 38% are girls. Girls who live and/or work in the streets are exposed to various kinds of danger: sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and violence.

“Because there is a higher proportion of boys in the streets, we heard stories of several boys raping one girl,” says Nao Phalla, an officer from MS. “Girls also report stories about policemen, security guards or men in uniforms, arresting them at night to have sex with them. They are often beggars or flower sellers and they are very likely to fall into prostitution.”

In addition to the hardship and abuse that results from life in the streets, one of the most difficult challenges facing these children is marginalization. “They are excluded,” explains

Nao Phalla, “because they do not have access to formal education, legal documents, public services or the skills to find a job.” This situation further isolates them from the general community which tends to stigmatize them. “The failure to address inequality, stigmatization and discrimination based on wealth, gender, ethnicity, language, location and disability, is holding back progress towards Education for All” said Marong Chhoeung, Aide et Action (AEA) Programme Officer.

“They (children in the street) are excluded because they do not have access to formal education, legal documents, public services or the skills to find a job.”

Addressing marginalization through girls' education

While Sopea was working in the street, outreach social workers came to meet her and her family. Unlike other street children, she enthusiastically wanted to be referred to an educational centre for street children because her mother was keen for her to continue her studies. “One day, some people from MS came and talked to my mum,” she remembers. “They

said to her, me and my sister, we could go to school and my mother was very happy about that.”

A few months ago, Sopea started remedial classes which are designed to help students behind in their studies to catch up to the appropriate grade level for their age. She will learn to achieve expected competencies in core academic skills such as literacy and numeracy. Sopea entered a project implemented by MS that is part of the Cambodian Consortium for Out of School Children (CCOSC), led by AEA and co-funded by Educate A Child (EAC). This programme addresses the issue of marginalization by improving both the accessibility and quality of education.

“Education is not only a useful means to prevent children from being excluded [...] it is about empowerment and leadership for girls and women in Cambodia.”

A special emphasis is put on the specific needs of street children from a gender perspective, in order to combat some of the increased vulnerabilities faced by girls and women on the streets. The approach includes gender-sensitive counselling and services, specifically trained

female counsellors and nurses, and training and income generation support for mothers. Moreover, education materials have been produced on various gender specific themes such as reproductive health, domestic violence, women’s rights. Consequently, those benefiting from these services are better equipped to live safe and independent lives, despite their challenging circumstances.



Sopea enjoys learning at the educational centre for street children ©AEA Cambodia / Cao

Sopea is now relatively safe from the dangers and risks of street life. “I like everything in the educational centre,” she says with enthusiasm. “Here, people are kind. I can learn a lot by myself as well. We do sport, drawing, mathematics, reading and writing. My sister started beauty class too. My mother is very happy.”

As Marong Chhoeung explains, “we work on appropriate solutions to address specific needs of marginalized girls and we pay special attention to girls because of their vulnerability and exposure to all kinds of abuse and exploitation in the streets. Education is not only a useful means to prevent children from being excluded from an educational and family environment; it is not only about integrating them into society - It is about empowerment and leadership for girls and women in Cambodia.”

Sopea will now join public school in the coming months. She is very excited about the idea of going back to school. “I want to become an art teacher. So, I want to come back to school. I want to draw a lot so I can improve my drawing skills.” Her dream for the future? “I want my friends to stop fighting. I want us to live in peace. I want all my friends to study so they can understand that we can live in peace.”

Providing girls with an education helps break the cycle of poverty: educated women are less vulnerable to diseases such as HIV/AIDS, more likely to have a healthy family, and are more likely to send their own children to school. When all children have access to a quality education rooted in human rights and gender equality, it creates a ripple effect of opportunities that influences generations to come.



Children Catch-Up with their Education Rights

Anne-Cecile Vialle and U Thet Naing, UNICEF Field Office for South-East Myanmar

(A version of this article first appeared on [UNICEF Myanmar's blog](#) on April 2, 2015)

Khaing Khaing Hnin, 16 years old, had to leave the regular primary school she attended in Saw Wa village seven years ago when she was just in Grade 3. “My mother has psychological health problems and my parents divorced. Then my father migrated to Thailand,” said Khaing Khaing Hnin. In Dawei Township of Tanintharyi Region, where Khaing Khaing lives, migration for work and child labour are common, and dozens of students drop out of primary school each year.

“I noticed Khaing Khaing Hnin's vulnerability at that time and I looked for ways to reintegrate her into the education system,” revealed Khaing Khaing's teacher, Nyein Nyein Khaing. With the support of the Quality Basic Education Programme's Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) equivalency programme, Nyein Nyein Ei established a NFPE centre in Saw Wa primary school in 2011, and her former student Khaing Khaing became one of the most active attendees.

The Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) programme provides an accelerated catch-up for children with lessons in Myanmar language, mathematics, sciences and life-skills.

The NFPE two-year equivalency program offers a second chance for education to 10-14 year old children who have never attended school. NFPE supports these out of school children to complete primary level education so they can re-join the formal school system. The programme provides an accelerated catch-up for children with lessons in Myanmar language, mathematics, sciences and life-skills.

Community volunteers receive training, as well as teaching and learning materials to run classes for 2.5 hours a day, 6 days a week. Classes are held in the afternoon and evenings so that more children currently out of school are able to benefit from the programme, because they can complete their chores or do paid work during the day.

“Dawei currently counts seven NFPE centres, and a total of 200 students have graduated from NFPE since 2011. During the 2014-2015 school year, an impressive 72% of NFPE students graduating from six of the centres reintegrated into regular secondary school,” says Than Nyunt, NFPE monitor for the entire Tanintharyi Region.



*Khaing Khaing Hnin with her teacher Nyein Nyein Khaing (left) and Regional NFPE Monitor Than Nyunt (right)
©UNICEF Myanmar*

Khaing Khaing completed the whole NFPE equivalency programme in 2013 and is now learning in Grade 7 at Dawei Zayar Bumi Monastic Middle school, which shelters girls in difficult situations and provides education for free.

Khaing Khaing only has words of gratitude for the NFPE programme. “I like it. I am so happy to learn again. Without this programme I would probably be working on a farm with my father

in Thailand, or doing domestic work in my village...thanks to this programme I will be able to realise my ambition of becoming a teacher.”

Myanmar’s constitution guarantees access to free and compulsory primary education to all children, however, low levels of investment have prevented many children from completing basic education.

Recent data released from the 2014 Census shows just 64% of children aged 5-17 years are attending school...many children are dropping out of school as they transition through lower and secondary levels.

Valuable efforts are being made by the Government of Myanmar (GoM) to reform the education sector. Compared to 2012, public spending in education in 2014 increased by 49%. Investment in the education sector in Myanmar now represents about 6% of public expenditure. However, this is still the lowest level of investment in the ASEAN region.

Despite these advances, recent data released from the 2014 Census shows just 64% of children aged 5-17 years are attending school, with higher attendance in primary grades and many children dropping out of school as they transition through lower and upper secondary levels.

It is estimated that over one million children are out of school -- over 500,000 at the primary level and over 250,000 at the lower secondary level. Children are often pushed out of school due to poverty, both the indirect costs of schooling and the need to contribute to the family income, and by the increased distances needed to travel to secondary schools.

In this context, the Quality Basic Education Programme (QBEP) aims to support the Government of Myanmar to improve access to, and quality of, school readiness and primary level education for all children.

With the collaboration of QBEP, the GoM, and private business donors, this school year NFPE is being implemented in 82 townships. A key aim now is to advocate for the mainstreaming of the NFPE programme by the Ministry of Education and local education authorities, to promote sustainability of the programme for the long term.



The goal of the QBEP is to support the Government of Myanmar to improve access to, and quality of, school readiness and primary level education for all children by helping to ensure that national education policies and plans are inclusive and informed; delivering quality education services to children in 34 core disadvantaged townships throughout the country. QBEP is supported by the Multi Donor Education Fund (MDEF), comprised of donors including Australia, Denmark, the European Union, Norway, the United Kingdom, and UNICEF.



Addressing the root causes of marginalization

By Aide et Action Cambodia and Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE)

Ethnic minorities often experience high levels of poverty, the root causes of which frequently lie in discrimination, marginalization and exclusion. Imran Rasitas, 10 years old, is from the Cham Muslim minority group in Cambodia. She lives in a small bamboo cottage in Chum Nik commune, Khroch Chhmar district of Tbong Khmum province near the Mekong River. Her mother Kry Mas, is a widowed farmer who is struggling to make a living. With this kind of seasonal job, she can only earn from 3.50 to 5 USD per day.

Rasitas was a grade 5 student at Chumnik Primary School which is about 2 km away from her house. She often came late to school and was sometimes absent because the only bicycle the family owned had to be used to work in the rice fields. Rasitas had to borrow her friend's bike and sometimes she walked to school. She ended up dropping out of school.

“The inequalities experienced by minorities manifest themselves not only in terms of income or wealth, but also in terms of lack of opportunity and poor access to public services such as education,” explains Ekvisoth Khatty, Aide et Action (AEA) programme officer. “Although the level of discrimination of the Cham community by the general community is quite low, they mainly experience social and economic marginalization.”

Tahiet Sless, the Project Manager for the Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE) explains that some cultural barriers remain in Cambodia and can be addressed

through education. “We can observe in schools that Cham and Khmer children did not interact with each other but tended to create separate groups. We decided to ask the school director to assign seats in the classroom so Khmer and Cham children can learn and grow together from an early age.”

“In schools Cham and Khmer children did not interact with each other [seats were assigned in the classroom] ... so Khmer and Cham children can learn and grow together from an early age.”

It is important to address poverty, which is a main barrier to education for many.

Rasitas and her mother were encouraged by Mad Hakim, a member of the School Support Committee which represents the villagers in decision-making for the school's development, to be involved in an education project implemented by KAPE as part of the Cambodian Consortium for Out-of-School Children (CCOSC). The CCOSC is led by AEA and co-funded by Educate A Child (EAC). As a result of her decision to engage in the project, Rasitas

has since received a scholarship to attend school.



Rasitas on her way to school. Rasitas is expected to complete her primary education, overcoming the language barrier she formerly faced © CCOSC/KAPE/SLESS

She is now back to school and attends regularly. She is also involved in many activities with her friends and through the children’s council. “It is not a problem anymore to buy school materials,” she says smiling. Rasitas was provided with two sets of school uniforms, a pair of slippers, five note books, four pens, a pencil and a ruler for the first year scholarship distribution. “I don’t want to drop out of school because so many people were worried about me, they encouraged me and tried to help my family. I have to be grateful and keep the top grades in class.”

Her mother also explains: “I am very glad my daughter could get these materials. It is not easy for me since my husband died, sometimes I need Rasitas to help me to work to survive. I don’t have any other choice.” She added: “Since Rasitas got this support, I can spend less for her so I feel better. I am very proud of Rasitas good results at school. I really want her to be a smart student and study as long as possible.” Rasitas is expected to complete her primary education. Overcoming the language barrier.

In Cambodia, the officially recognised language is Khmer. Cham people speak a different language than the national language, which can bring further challenges in accessing state services such as education.

“When I was 6 years old, I remember it was very hard for me to understand what the teacher said,” explains Rasitas. This is the reason why the programme includes bilingual classes with a main teacher and a bilingual classroom assistant. As Rasitas reinforces her skills in Khmer writing, reading and speaking, she increases her chances to access higher levels of education in Cambodia as the language of instruction in the country is usually Khmer.

“We need to overcome the barrier of language and to ensure all children have a chance to learn and integrate into Cambodian society” says Ekvisoth Khatty. “Children who attend school in an unfamiliar language and culture are less likely to succeed in their studies. They will also struggle more to access education and stay in school. This results in low educational attainment and high dropout rates.”

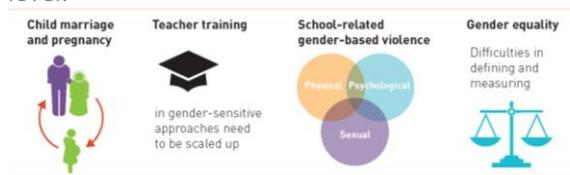
“We need to overcome the barrier of language and to ensure all children have a chance to learn and integrate into Cambodian society”

Girls’ education in the Cham community

Elderly Cham people have witnessed a dramatic change in girls’ education in their community. In the past, girls were not allowed to go to school. Tahieeth Sless explains: “It is an old mentality in the Muslim culture. Today, a few Cham people still think that girls do not need high school and that they should get married young. However, the government in Cambodia with the support of NGO’s intensify efforts to provide the right to education to all, boys and girls. We make awareness raising sessions and we discuss with parents about the importance of girls’ education. Today, there is gender parity.”

This year, a total of 311 children have enrolled in Rasitas’ school, 47.5% girls. In addition, scholarships have been distributed to 12 children, including eight girls. “We must ensure the right to education to all minority groups regardless of their ethnic, religious or other identities. We commit to increasing efforts, not only to address inequalities from the perspective of those marginalised, but to promote equality and non-discrimination through education and awareness raising,” concluded Ekvisoth Khatty. 

The recently released [2015 Education For All Global Monitoring Report](#) identified 1) child marriage and pregnancy; 2) the need to scale-up teacher-training in gender-sensitive approaches; 3) School Related Gender Based Violence; and 4) difficulties in defining and measuring gender equality; as **persistent challenges** at the global level.



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What's Up in EAP UNGEI?

World Education Forum: Setting the Global Agenda for Education as a Human Right

Tanvir Muntasim, ActionAid International

In Incheon, South Korea, The World Education Forum (WEF) discussed the global education agenda for the next 15 years and concluded by adopting the Incheon Declaration. 1,500 participants included more than 130 ministers, government officials, Nobel Laureates, NGO and private sector representatives, academics and other key stakeholders.



World Education Forum plenary session on May 20
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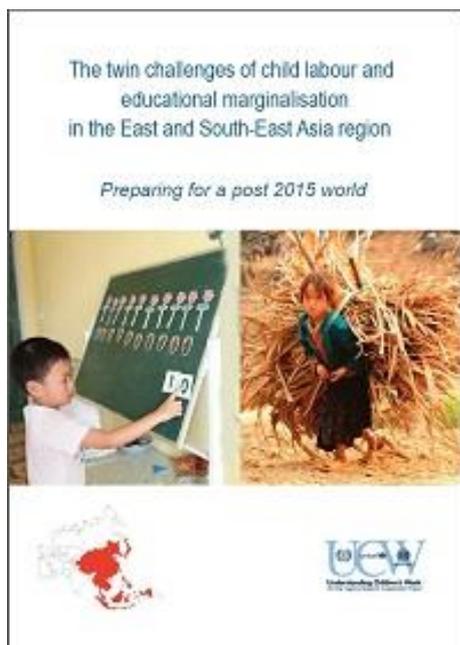
The [final Declaration](#) is quite progressive in its articulation and ambitious in its aspirations. It also prioritizes girls' education and gender equity. In the twenty paragraph declaration, one paragraph has been dedicated to gender equity. The importance of eliminating gender based violence in schools has also been emphasized, which is a successful outcome of sustained policy advocacy. Proposed indicators for the draft Framework for Action, to be finalized in November, include a 'Percentage of students experiencing bullying, corporal punishment, harassment, violence, sexual discrimination and abuse,' which will be very useful in terms of identifying and addressing gender based violence in schools. However, activists will need to maintain a close watch to ensure that it is included in the final Framework for Action and the list of indicators.

This is only the first important step in winning the case for education as a public good and making it part of adequately resourced national policies. There is commitment for 12 years of publicly funded primary and secondary education in the Declaration, but there are serious implications for the resources needed to make this a reality. The upcoming Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa in July and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Summit in September will be crucial for securing the policy, political will and resource commitments that will determine whether education for all will be realized before the deadline of 2030.

The Twin Challenges of Child Labour and Educational Marginalisation in the East and South-East Asia Regions

International Labour Organisation (ILO) Asia

To mark the World Day against Child Labour (June 12), the ILO, in collaboration with UNICEF, UNESCO and UNGEI, launched a report [*the twin challenges of child labour and educational marginalisation in the East and South-East Asia region*](#), looking at eight countries - Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam and Mongolia. Much remains to be done to overcome the twin challenges of child labour and educational marginalisation in the East and Southeast Asia regions, according to a recent report by the Understanding Children's Work (UCW) programme, an ILO research conducted initiative jointly with UNICEF and the World Bank.



The study stresses that both child labour and educational marginalisation can lead to social vulnerability and societal exclusion.
©ILO Asia

The Asia and Pacific region hosts the largest number of child labourers in the world according to the ILO – 78 million out of 168 million globally. Although the eight countries covered by the study (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Vietnam and Mongolia) have collectively shown improvements in terms of child labour elimination and primary school attendance, the study reports that these 8 countries are still host to over five million children in the 5 to 17 years age range who are in child labour, and to over three million primary school-aged children who are out of school, many due to the demands of work. Of particular concern are children 15-17 years of age, where data indicates between 20-30 percent of these children in several of these countries are in hazardous work. Further, many are not even captured in available data – undocumented migrants, the stateless, victims of prostitution and trafficking, and other illicit activities.

Lack of interest in school, education not being perceived as important, and lack of access for those with disabilities feature as the primary reasons for children not attending in school, overriding commonly perceived factors such as the affordability of education. Boys face a greater risk of child labour in all but Cambodia and Lao PDR.



The launch of the study was followed by panel discussions around this year's World Day Against Child Labour theme, "NO to Child Labour, YES to Quality Education" with experts from CSOs and UN agencies. (From left: Abigail Cuales Lanceta (SEAMEO); Phil Robertson (Human Rights Watch); Simrin Singh (ILO) moderator; Sukti Dasgupta (ILO); and Dan Rono (UNICEF EAPRO) ©ILO Asia

The study stresses that both child labour and educational marginalisation can lead to social vulnerability and societal exclusion, and both can permanently impair productive potential and therefore influence lifetime patterns of employment and pay. Child labour is often associated with direct threats to children's health and well-being in the eight countries. By far the largest share of child labourers in the eight countries are found in agriculture, one of the three most dangerous sectors in which to work at any age.

Significant numbers of children in the eight countries are also found in other hazardous forms of child labour, including mining, off-shore fishing, brick-making and garment production, and in extreme forms of child labour, including commercial sexual exploitation and child trafficking.

There are no simple solutions for the millions of children in the study countries who remain trapped in child labour and out of school. Child labour is a complex phenomenon requiring a response that is comprehensive in nature and that involves simultaneous action across a range of policy sectors.

The eight study countries have committed themselves to combat child labour through different legislative, policy and development measures. Still much remains to be done.

Announcements

Farewell to Min Bista and welcome to Justine Sass as the new Co-Chair of EAP UNGEI. Min Bista, who has served as the UNESCO Gender Focal Point (GFP) in Asia-Pacific and Co-Chair of EAP UNGEI for 3 years, retired from UNESCO in May 2015. Min has been a champion in girls' education and gender in education. We will miss you very much, Min! Following his departure, Justine Sass will serve as UNESCO's acting GFP and Co-Chair of the EAP UNGEI.

NO to Child Labour, YES to Quality Education! To mark the World Day against Child Labour (June 12) with the theme of "NO to Child Labour, YES to Quality Education," the ILO, in collaboration with UNICEF, UNESCO and UNGEI, launched the "Twin Challenges of Child Labour and Educational Marginalisation in the East and South-East Asia Region," followed by an expert panel discussions. The report by the Understanding Children's Work (UCW) programme, an ILO research initiative jointly with UNICEF and the World Bank looks into the twin challenges of child labour and educational marginalisation in eight countries - Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam and Mongolia. The event brought together about 70 participants from academia, CSOs, governments, and UN agencies.

Upcoming Webinar on "Girls, Disabilities, and School Education in the East Asia and Pacific Region" Based on the [draft report on "Girls, Disabilities, and School Education in the East Asia and Pacific Region"](#) published in 2014, EAP UNGEI will host a webinar with the co-author of the report David Clarke (date TBD). For more information, please contact [Laura Devos](#), the Working Group Coordinator of EAP UNGEI.

UNGEI South Asia Regional Meeting. The UNGEI South Asia Regional Meeting of country focal persons and key partners including the Ministry of Education and NGOS from all the eight countries of South Asia region was organized in April 2015. The meeting was strategically focused to reinvigorate partnership efforts to address challenges in girls' education and gender equality. Also, to map out high impact initiatives in the region, the meeting facilitated learning exchange in partnership with EAP UNGEI and developed a shared vision of the strategic opportunities for girls' education and gender equality to maximize capacity in the countries. For further inquiries on the UNGEI South Asia, please contact [Sanullah Panezai](#).