

East Asia and Pacific United Nations Girls' Education Initiative Newsletter Issue No. 3 December 2009



IN FOCUS – GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN CLIMATE CHANGE AND OTHER EMERGENCIES

In the third issue of the EAP UNGEI newsletter, we have focused on the implications of climate change and emergencies on children, especially for boys and girls. The theme for this newsletter manifested itself very timely to coincide with the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark on 7-18 December 2009, but also reflects back on a year, in which many countries in the region have experienced the significant crisis from natural disasters and emergencies.

The threat of climate change is one of the most serious challenges we are facing and has serious implications on not only the environment but also on safeguarding human rights, the economy and social development. The EAP UNGEI partnership recognizes that climate change poses an immediate and far-reaching threat – affecting children – both boys and girls – and their chances to recognize their full rights and potentials.

The gender-related impacts in education will manifest differently across the region, but we would anticipate that existing disparities and gender inequalities may be exacerbated, unless special attention is given. During the 52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2008, climate change was discussed as an emerging issue affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men. The commission noted that “gender experts are consulted in climate change processes at all levels, so that women’s and men’s specific needs and priorities are identified and addressed.”

We hope that the stories in this newsletter, shared by our partners at UNICEF, Plan International and Save the Children from the ground, will highlight the reality of climate change and disasters, and its impacts on boys and girls and their engagement in education. This issue also reflects back on the UNESCO/UNGEI regional photo contest, looks back at the recent global UNGEI meeting and previews key events in the year to come.

INVESTING IN EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

By Jill Lawler, UNICEF EAPRO

December marks a critical month for children. Over 65 world leaders and representatives of 192 countries are expected to agree to a new climate change framework when the Kyoto Protocol’s first commitment period expires in 2012. The task is difficult, but critical.

Today’s children will experience at least a 2° C increase in temperatures in their lifetime. Even if the best case climate projections come true, many of East Asia and Pacific’s (EAP) children will be facing a future of declining water and food supplies, and increasing disasters and risks of disease, with long-term consequences on their development.

As they are the next generation of environmental stewards, teachers, development planners and policy makers, it is critical that children have the education and tools needed to drive a low carbon

future and that empowers them to be thoughtful and prepared citizens able to adapt to ever changing circumstances.

This is especially important as children already face a number of development challenges. Over 100 million children in East Asia and Pacific are stunted, not immunized or missing out on quality education or other essential services. One-third of the region's children will not reach their full physical and cognitive potential. Vaccine-preventable diseases and diarrhea remain two of the leading causes of childhood death. While the region has made progress in enhancing access to education, millions of children remain out of school.

Knowledge and awareness are the basic elements for building individual agency and empowering children and youth. Climate change presents an opportunity for children to learn about their environment and community, and their role as global citizens.

Climate change impacts the livelihoods of the poor through the culmination of repeated floods, drought and other disasters. It is a combination of these effects that can send families into poverty, impacting children's lives, development and overall potential. For families at the margins of poverty, the slightest impact on their livelihoods can affect the ability of parents to feed themselves and their children.

With few assets, families may be forced to withdraw children from school or forgo health treatment, reduce food consumption, or turn to child labor to provide income support. This typically means removing girls first from school to collect water and fuel and supplement household income, reversing gains in gender equality.

Deprivations in nutrition, health and education are intrinsically damaging to future employment and economic advancement. Research in many countries has shown that stunting leads to poor skills and cognitive development, which further restricts opportunities for income generation, locking families in intergenerational cycles of poverty.

It is the development of children's various capabilities that will determine their resilience to climate change and the likelihood they will break out of poverty. There is a strong case for enhancing investments in children's education – both formal education and life skills training – to expand access to, and broaden, opportunities for their economic, social and political participation in the context of climate change. Even more, children's own knowledge of their environment can be instrumental in forming adaptation strategies and driving a low-carbon economy. Experiences with community risk mapping show that children have a much greater capacity to participate in climate change activities and disaster risk reduction as they are those most familiar with their physical surroundings. They can be strong stewards and advocates for the environment, helping their homes, schools, and communities adapt to climate change.

UNICEF is collaborating with UN agencies and other partners to develop an array of child-sensitive climate change education and disaster risk reduction resources for schools and communities. The period 2005-2014 has been designated as the "United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development" with focus on strengthening formal and non-formal education approaches to raise awareness of climate change impacts, adaptation and mitigation measures.

A key priority is to enhance education processes that are multi-directional, targeting children as both active learners and teachers in climate change. This approach includes participatory, skills-based learning and a protective, enabling environment as laid out in the principles of Child-Friendly schooling.

Education must also foster strong and capable national and local political leadership throughout the region. UNICEF recently supported a Children's Climate Forum in parallel with global climate talks held in Copenhagen, Denmark where Climate Youth Ambassadors called for better and sustained engagement on climate change at the regional and country level.

It is important to maintain this momentum in social activism by accelerating environmental education and strengthening the voice of youth policy development. UNICEF is exploring strategies for working

with youth networks and youth media to raise awareness and supporting children in implementing their own strategies for addressing climate change.

As governments negotiate a post-Kyoto framework, UNICEF, together with other partners, has an opportunity to strengthen investments in children. Knowledge of the issues and meaningful participation from an early age will lead to an informed and skilled generation of decision makers with greater potential for safe environmental stewardship.

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THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE AFTER A STORM

By Plan International, Viet Nam



(Photo: Plan International) After a storm, children earn a living by searching for gold dusts in Quang Tri province

Quang Tri, Vietnam - Climate change has affected regions all over the world, however, none more so than Asia. The drastic increases in natural disasters that have ravaged Asian nations include typhoons, tsunamis, flash floods, landslides, cyclones, earthquakes and fires. One such devastating example is the recent Ketsana typhoon in October 2009 that killed 172 people in Vietnam alone. A Plan Vietnam staff member reports on how it has impacted on women and girls from Ta Long commune, Quang Tri province, Vietnam:

“More than ten days have passed since the Ketsana storm hit Ta Long commune, Quang Tri province. The damages caused by the storm are still evident everywhere. Houses are totally or partially collapsed, signs, electricity bases and trees are down, roads are buried under earth and rocks due to landslides, schools and their furniture are wet and dirty, crops are destroyed, and gardens are decimated. Many temporary shelters are set up. People search frantically for food and clear up debris. Many people go to the mountains looking for vegetables. Some try to catch small fish in the dirty streams. The stun and fear are still etched on their faces. Natural disaster makes poor people become poorer.

Walking through the village, I suddenly saw many small figures digging, desperately searching for something in a rocky river where the water had turned yellow and dirty. I decided to find out what these people were searching for in such a dangerous place. It took me quite some time to scale the rough and winding cliff. Once I reached the site, I discovered that most of these figures were women and children.

It was 15.30. These people were digging rocks fervently. I learnt that they were searching for gold. This work is much harder than many other jobs. They have to use an iron bar to dig deeply into holes and rocky slots. The earth they dig up is then loaded on to a pointed round tray. These small people soak the trays and themselves with water and hope to see some shining gold dust. Working from dawn to dusk, a woman may earn 80,000-90,000 VND (US \$5) per day while a girl can earn 30,000 VND (US \$1.70). If they don't discover any, they go home with nothing.

Talking with these people, I learned that before the storm, there were only men searching for gold because it is a very dangerous job. After the storm, women and girls had to join them as it became the only source of income.

There, I saw a mother loading the earth into the trays of two young girls who were standing in the yellow water. They came from Ta Long commune. Since the storm, they walk here every morning at daybreak to search for gold dust.

“The storm came and took all our family’s property, including our books. Now I cannot go back to school because my school was also seriously damaged,” said Thuy to Thanh*, a 12 year-old girl from Ta Long commune. Pi Tha, her mother added: “Now we don’t have enough food and thus no matter how hard this job is, we still have to do it.” Later, I find out that the second girl is Tha to Hoa*, a sponsored child of Plan Vietnam. Talking to me, the mother and two daughters keep working continuously as they have to earn enough for the day.

Although this family has received emergency food from Plan including 15kg of rice, two litres of cooking oil, 30 packs of instant noodles and one kilogram of salt, it’s not enough for them to survive for long. Plan Vietnam will work to support Thuy and Tha and many other children so they return to school. Livelihood rehabilitation activities will also be implemented to help these poor families overcome their dark time.

* Names have been changed.

LOST IN THE STORM – CHILDREN DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL

By Plan International, Viet Nam



(Photo: Nguyen Dinh Duc) Thu and her parents standing at the place which used to be their house

Quang Ngai, Vietnam - Nguyen Thi Thu, a 12 year-old-girl, comes from Binh My commune, Quang Ngai province in Vietnam. Thu lives with her parents and two elder brothers who are at grade 12 and grade 8. Working hard on the field, her parents are able to afford their children to go to school and ensure a good living standard for the whole family.

But everything changed on the night of 29 September when the Ketsana storm swept through her village. Returning from the migration place, the family found only a pile of broken bricks. The family’s solid house had totally collapsed. All properties including TV, bed, chairs, table, wardrobe, and the family saving for children to go to school that are US \$200 and 0.4 ounce of gold were washed away. Thirty poultry heads and 450kg of rice were also lost. Although sad, the family still found themselves luckier than many neighbours because no one was seriously injured or lost in the storm.

“We don’t know when we could build our house again. We have to find enough food to survive first”, said Mai - Thu’s mother who is 50 years old. “The saving for our children to go to school is lost. They may have to stop going to school this year”, added Mai.

“I don’t know if my parents can afford our school’s tuition fee. We are afraid that we do not have enough food to eat. I wish someone can help us out”, said Thu.

Thu family is only one of nearly 1,600 families affected by the storm in Binh My commune, one of the most serious damaged areas. Every family is now focusing on setting up a shelter, collecting enough food and water and clearing the debris. As a result, not many people are thinking about sending their

children back to school yet because the children who stayed at home could help their parents in rehabilitating activities.

To immediately support children and families affected by the storm, Plan Vietnam is delivering rice, cooking oil, instant noodle, and salt to more than 15,300 families in 18 communes of Quang Ngai, Quang Tri and Kon Tum provinces. With these support, each family can have enough basic food for about two weeks. Plan Vietnam is also looking for financial supports to help these communities with food and shelters, hygiene condition, rehabilitation of education, healthcare services, livelihoods, and repairing road and bridges, in the hope that children can go back to school as well as fulfil their rights.

SURVIVING THE TSUNAMI: SO THEY WON'T SUFFER LIKE US

By Save the Children

Bangkok, Thailand - Ismael is now 17. He is one of the active members of Baan Talae Nok Youth Group. The Andaman Tsunami wiped out his school and part of the village in 2004. His experience teaches him that learning about disasters can save lives. Here is his story.

"It was Sunday. The New Year was coming near. Our teacher asked us to go to school to rehearse a play for the district's New Year celebration. (The night before) all of us slept at the school, returned home in the morning, and went back to do the rehearsal at the school again. We were waiting for our teacher to come back from the market, when we saw something that looked like a big sponge in the horizon. We saw boats flipping. Someone was wondering if it was a submarine or a helicopter crashing into the sea. At that moment the teacher came back and asked one of us to go back to the village and get a camera. The teacher and the rest of us walked on to the beach to see what happened. Then a soldier came shouting at us, telling us to run to high ground. We started to run but when we reached the teachers' room at school, the wave got us."

"I felt numb. It was like something very big was on me. I felt I could not survive. When the second wave hit, I got loose and was able to go to the water surface. Then, I just went unconscious. When I was in the water, it was like being in a washing machine. Everything was spinning. I felt the sunshine as I woke up on a hillside. I found myself buried under the mud with my head sticking out from the ground. I struggled to pull myself out of the mud and started to run up the hill. My lips were cut through and I was bleeding here and there. I found a couple of farmers on the hill and they told me to keep walking to the village. I walked until I met my mom. I was crying while my mom was washing my face with fresh water. Then she went down to look for my younger brother. It took her several hours to find his body. He did not survive."

Ismael was one of the lucky three students who survived the wave. His teacher along with his brother and seven more classmates did not make it.

"I did not go back to Baan Talae Nok. I went to stay at my grandma's place in another village instead. I only went back to my village the next day for my brother's funeral. The village was deserted. People started to rumour about the end of the world. I was afraid."

"There were some government agencies that came to set up temporary classrooms and ran some learning and drawing activities. They made me forget about what had happened a little bit, but not all. I was afraid that I did not dare to do anything. Everyone was afraid that they did not do anything. When we heard the rumour about the end of the world, we did not want to do anything. I was so afraid. I had to be with my parents at all times. I asked them to go to class with me."

To Ismael's relief, the rumour about the end of the world was corrected by a group of volunteer college students who came into the village and educated them about the Tsunami. However, Ismael and other children were still traumatized. They were afraid of the sea. They did not go near the beach where their old school was as a new school was built on a hill. They were always in a panic when they heard a loud noise. The headmistress of his school together with Rabatbai Group – a local children's network and Save the Children's partner – tried to find ways to help the children overcome their fears and trauma.

Children were encouraged to observe what were left in their village, instead of thinking about what they had lost. To rebuild the children's self-esteem and confidence, the children were introduced to 'voluntary work' and how they could contribute to their community – making them feel capable and useful.

It was a successful start. Almost a year after the Tsunami, children started to change. They rebuilt the garden in their old school ground, and started to discuss with Rabatbai Group what they wanted to do for their village. It started with a community theatre, which gave Ismael an opportunity to release what was inside his mind, and it made him feel better. He said the theatre helped him to express 'himself' out.



Later on Ismael and his friends started to think about smaller children – what they could do if a Tsunami hits. They were worried that smaller children had lesser chance to survive a Tsunami. So they came up with the idea of a puppet theatre called "The Alert Rabbit". The children of Baan Talae Nok wrote the story by themselves. It is a story about a rabbit that is always careless and panicking about everything. Later, the rabbit learns how to prepare for disasters with his community.

In order to spread the word, the children of Baan Talae Nok, Rabat Bai and Save the Children put the play into a storybook for children. It is suitable for primary school children as well as adults who lack knowledge on disasters. The book is indeed a mini-manual on disaster preparedness. It talks about what a disaster is, how a Tsunami happens, how to pack a life-saving bag, and evacuation routes. It also comes with games and a set of cards for children to check their understanding about vulnerable groups, capacities, and resources in their community.

BOYS AND GIRLS WORKING TOGETHER TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES

By Save the Children

Uttaradith, Thailand - In a district of Uttaradith province in Thailand, where children experienced flash flood and massive land slide three years ago and repeatedly experienced small floods every other year, Save the Children works with a local youth network to educate children about disasters and preparedness. Children were introduced to warning systems such as how to read rain gauge and natural signs. As a result, children became more alert but calm when there is heavy rain.

"(Now when there's heavy rain) ... people move things up on a higher ground. The Village Head will announce through community radio to alert everyone. In the latest flood, I noticed that the river starting to get muddy because of the mud from the mountains, and the water in the rain gauge rised to the red zone. I then told my dad and my mom to pack our things upstairs. But the flood was not so bad. My house only flooded a little." Ball, 13-year-old boy

Having learned about the causes and effects of disasters, children become more aware of the environmental changes around them, including changes in temperatures, which have impacts on their lives. Several young leaders also initiated projects in their communities and schools to reduce environmental changes.

“We formed a youth group and had Andaman Discoveries – an eco-tourism agency – as our supporter. Among our first activities as Baan TalaeNok Youth Group were wetlands preservation, collecting garbage on the beach, and inventing bamboo tubes as money collectors. We children discussed with each other what we wanted to do. When we wanted to do something, we called for a meeting inviting every child in the village to join. Some adults joined our meeting as well. We also raise funds by ourselves. We make things for sale.”

“(Having children actively participate in the activities) it benefits all in the village. First, the villagers’ children can join the activities, which make them more confident. And the village benefits from our activities in return. For example, when we collect the garbage to recycle, we also clean the village. We recycle the garbage into greeting cards and sell them, then we earn money to for another activity for the village.”

Chompunek Jongbhakdi, a 12-year-old girl from Kiriwong Village, Nakhon Si Thammarat province shares her thoughts on climate change:

“It rains in the summer as well, and it gets cold after the rain. During the monsoon season, strong sunshine comes immediately after the rain, although it would rain again soon. It’s unpredictable. For example, once I did my laundry and put them out in the sun to dry, I didn’t think it was going to rain. I sat inside the house and watched TV. Suddenly, it rained. Before, if it would rain, we’d see black clouds coming. Now we can’t tell if it’s going to rain.”

“I think it (the climate change) is caused by people in the world, not only the people in my community. It relates to global warming. There is much pollution in the atmosphere because people burn plastic and garbage. In the past, people put garbage (e.g. leaves, natural garbage, etc.) under the trees so they became organic fertilizer, but now people get rid of their garbage (e.g. plastic) by burning. For example, the public dustmen don’t come to my grandmother’s house because it’s too far, so my grandmother burns her garbage. I asked her why she does that, whether the dustmen came to collect her garbage. She replied that they hadn’t come for a long time and she didn’t know why. She said that when they didn’t come and we didn’t burn it, the garbage would increase. I told her that burning garbage could cause global warming. My grandma said that she knew it but what could she do. She could not do anything because they dustmen did not come.”

“... I think we can do it (help reduce the global warming) by reducing the use of plastic bags and use cotton bags instead. Here, people use ‘Pai’. It’s not really a bag. It’s a piece of cloth that you tie the four corners together, and it becomes a bag for shopping in the market. When it gets old and dirty, people will use it for carrying durians or mangosteens because of their latex.”

“We should stop using plastic and foam, and only use what are earth-friendly. For example, if we want to wrap the chicken, we can use banana leaves from the banana trees in our house instead of the plastic, and put it in the fridge. If the wrapping banana leaf gets dry, we can use a new leaf to wrap the chicken, and put the old one away. The old leaf will become fertilizer. My family usually does this.”

PHOTO CONTEST FOCUSES ON GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

By Ashima Kapur, UNESCO Bangkok



Pich Nareth, Kandal Provincial Office for Education, Youth and Sport, Cambodia.

Bangkok, Thailand - Thirteen winning photos of UNESCO-UNGEI Asia-Pacific contest on promoting gender equality in education are now being announced. This photo contest under the theme:

“Reversing Realities: Seeking Gender Equality in Education” was to promote gender equality in education through images that aim to convey a better understanding of what gender equality actually means, to capture gender equality in action, and to show how stereotypical roles of girls and boys, women and men, are being challenged and transformed in schools, homes and communities across Asia.

The contest attracted more than 600 entries from 17 countries across the Asia-Pacific region. The photo entries were submitted by students, teachers, government officials, development workers and professional photographers from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Republic of Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand and Viet Nam. The organizers acknowledge the exceptional effort and sincerely thank all the photographers who took part in the contest.

Judging took place in which UNESCO Bangkok, UNGEI (EAP and SA) and many volunteers participated on the basis of which the 13 photos have been selected. The main criteria for selecting the winning entries is to capture gender equality in action and to show how stereotypical roles of girls and boys, women and men are being challenged in schools, homes and communities in the region.

The 13 winning photo entries have also been featured in the gender in education calendar for 2010 to be distributed throughout the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

The contest was organized by UNESCO Bangkok along with the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) East Asia and Pacific (EAP) and South Asia (SA).

Visual demonstration of 'gender equality in action' can help make the concept of gender equality more concrete and bring realism. It also shows that gender equality is actually not so difficult to promote and achieve and that it is nothing threatening, sensitive, or complicated. Gender equality must become everyone's business and priority, especially as we are committed to achieve Education for All by 2015.

To view the winning photos, please click on this [link](#).

UPDATES FROM THE UNGEI GLOBAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

By EAP UNGEI

Bangkok, Thailand - UNGEI's Global Advisory Committee (GAC) meets twice per year for shared planning, decision-making, guidance and accountability. The two co-chairs of the East Asia and Pacific UNGEI Working Group, Jon Kapp, Education Specialist with UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office and Maki Hayashikawa, Programme Specialist in Gender Equality and Quality Basic Education with UNESCO Bangkok, participated at the recently held second meeting in Paris, France on 7-8 December 2009. At the meeting, Regional UNGEI Focal Points were asked to present on the status of UNGEI partnerships in one country. Maki and Jon presented jointly on Papua New Guinea, where a partnership does not yet exist, but is considered a priority for 2010.

The GAC meeting consisted of a Business meeting and a Technical meeting, and for the first time, two country-level partnerships (from Cambodia and Nigeria) participated. This provided positive engagement and profile for national issues. The Business meeting reviewed progress against 2009 plans for global, regional and country levels and to establish priorities for 2010. The Technical meeting was held jointly with the UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team on HIV-AIDS. This meeting examined the inclusion-related issues in the 2010 Global Monitoring Report which found that issues relating to gender are well addressed. Discussions resulted in a set of recommendations which will be presented to the Working Group on EFA (WGEFA), which will meet immediately thereafter and feed into the High Level Group meeting in February 2010.

For more information on the documents, presentations and reports at the meeting, please visit this link: <http://www.ungei.org/paris2009/documents.html>.

GRANTS TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION NEEDS IN THE PACIFIC REGION AND EAST TIMOR

By AUSAID

Australia - The Australian Government is calling for applications from Australian and international non-government organisations (NGOs) to work with local organizations to scale up current successful community-based adaptation activities or to build an adaptation component onto existing community-based activities in the Pacific region, including East Timor. The objective of these grants is to increase the resilience of communities in the region to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. One of the guiding principles for proposed activities is that they ensure that the specific needs of men, women and children are addressed and that opportunities exist for women to participate as decision makers in determining objectives and types of activities. Deadline for applications is 26 February 2010.

For more information, visit this link: http://www.usaid.gov/au/business/other_opps/iccai.cfm.

PARTNER PROFILES

UNESCO Bangkok: Gender equality in education, as one of the six Education for All goals, is a crucial part of UNESCO's work. Goal 5 states: "Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality." In the Asia-Pacific region, UNESCO and other UN agencies have been working towards reducing gender disparities in education. The Gender in Education Programme is organized under the Asia Pacific Programme for Education for All (APPEAL). For more information on what they do, see [activities](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS

World Bank Gender Workshop. February 1-2, 2010. Viet Nam

Bi-monthly EAP UNGEI Meeting. Mid-February 2010. Bangkok, Thailand

Global UNGEI@10 Conference. Early May 2010. Dakar, Senegal

RESOURCES

WomenWatch: Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change - http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/#1

UNFPA: Facing a Changing World: Women, Population and Climate - <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2009/en/>

United Nations Climate Change Conference - <http://en.cop15.dk/about+cop15>

[Gender Issues in Counseling and Guidance in Post-Primary Education – Advocacy Brief](#) by Chemba Raghavan, UNESCO Bangkok, 2009