

## East Asia and Pacific United Nations Girls' Education Initiative Newsletter Issue No. 2 October 2009



### IN FOCUS - SKILLS AND TOOLS TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

In the second issue of the EAP UNGEI newsletter, we have focused on skills and tools to promote gender equality in education. The newsletter recaps the recent UNGEI workshop on using evidence-based advocacy for gender equality in education, reports findings from an e-discussion on education and skills training to improve the employability of young people, and shares stories on girls' education from our key partner in the region, Plan International.

This newsletter includes a compilation of some of the latest tools and resources from partner agencies and beyond in promoting gender equality in education. More information about the East Asia and Pacific UNGEI working group can now be found on the UNGEI website. Please click on this [link](#) to learn more of our on-going activities and to be more closely linked to the East Asia and Pacific partnership.

### EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION WORKSHOP

By EAP UNGEI



(Photo: Participants from Timor Leste, Mr. Afonso Soares, Director of Policy, Planning and Development, Ministry of Education; Ms. Rita Dewi, Education Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, UNICEF Timor Leste; and Muriel Lauvige, Gender Advisor for the Ministry of Education discusses about the analysis of education data with Mr. Jon Kapp, UNICEF's Education Specialist and Ms. Mika Mansukhani, Communication Specialist with UNIFEM, an EAP UNGEI partner.

UNICEF and UNGEI joined hands in support of stronger evidence-based advocacy towards gender equality in education.

"Advocating for gender in education is needed to ensure greater inclusiveness," said Dr. Chemba Raghavan, Education Consultant with UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office.

While there has been positive progress towards gender equity in education throughout the Asia-Pacific region, pockets of disparities continue to exist and most countries are still far from achieving gender equality in education. Poverty and socio-economic factors are still barriers facing girls and boys.

In some countries, the number of girls attending and completing basic education is lower than that of boys, especially ethnic girls in poor families in rural areas. In other contexts, it is the boys who are falling behind – enrolling and completing education at lower rates than their female counterparts.

Advocacy with persuasive data can change the climate in which policies are shaped. Conducting research and using the evidence it provides increases the impact advocacy may have in steering policy.

In an effort to support national efforts to ensure that gender equity and equality in education are met, UNICEF, together with the East Asia and Pacific UNGEI partnership, organized a workshop to strengthen the links between evidence and advocacy.

UNGEI is a partnership of organizations dedicated to promoting girls' education. It was launched in 2000 at the World Education Forum in Dakar and since then is still driven and committed to accelerating action on girls' education and ensuring that every girl and every boy, receives quality education. To learn more about UNGEI, please visit [www.ungei.org](http://www.ungei.org).

“One challenge in promoting gender equality in education in this region is caused by strategies that are often not evidence-based and innovative,” said Ms. Maki Hayashikawa, Programme Specialist in Gender and Basic Education with UNESCO Bangkok. “A lot of research is being done throughout the region but it is not being used effectively or enough. It is important to identify how research will be followed up or translated into policy.”

Country delegates from Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam representing ministries, UN agencies, regional networks and universities came together for this training workshop.

The workshop focused on the development of skills and experiences in utilizing gender and education data for advocacy. A hands-on training on EFAInfo was conducted by UNICEF EAPRO to introduce participants to a tool that easily presents and analyzes data for use in advocacy.

EFAInfo is a tool co-developed by UNICEF EAPRO and UNESCO Bangkok that gives easy access to cross-national and sub-national data by indicators and can be used to track a country's EFA progress and identify gaps. The database is available online at [www.devinfo.info/efainfo](http://www.devinfo.info/efainfo).

“Supporting advocacy with evidence is necessary in ensuring that advocacy and policy demands are realistic and representative; accurately represent needs, priorities and interests of constituencies; and enhances the credibility and professionalism of the campaign,” explained Mr. Terry Durnnian, Regional Advisor for Education with Save the Children and EAP UNGEI partner.

“Making messages that motivate” is also another critical next step in planning advocacy initiatives”, added Mr. Geoffrey Keele, Communication Specialist from UNICEF EAPRO. He reiterated that understanding what the numbers reflect helps to identify what needs to change – politically, economically, culturally – to fix the situation. “Always try to encourage action and possible solutions. For example, if 1/3 of children are suffering from chronic malnutrition, provide an action that the government needs to invest in iodized salt.”

He suggested a few simple guidelines for developing effective messages – defining the goal, identifying the audience, understanding the audience, keeping the message simple and persuasive, and determining the primary message that would resonate and appeal to the broadest audiences.

Throughout the four days, while initial training was provided, country groups progressively worked independently and were actively engaged in identifying three top key issues, drafting action plans and crafting key messages.

Many country delegations outlined concrete plans to put their work to use when they return home - both in advocacy to high level offices and through extended training in follow up workshops later in the year.

A learning guide on evidence-based advocacy for gender and education will also be developed by the East Asia and Pacific UNGEI working group to extend the content of the training to a broader audience in this region and beyond.

## **APYOUTHNET E-DISCUSSION ON EDUCATION AND SKILLS TO IMPROVE EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

By Pornpenn Phuntim, International Labour Organization

The [Asia Pacific Knowledge Network on Youth Employment \(APYouthNet\)](#) is a community of practice that connects youth employment experts from across the Asia Pacific region. As part of its services, APYouthNet hosts regularly scheduled e-discussion forums to allow members to harness the existing pool of knowledge and expertise within the community and beyond to discuss and address issues related to youth employment.

The most recent forum in July, moderated by EAP UNGEI co-chair, Mr. Jon Kapp, focused on the issue of “education and skills training to improve the employability of young people”. In particular, the forum’s participants debated on how education and training systems can be better matched to labour-market demand; and how rights to equality in education and employment can be upheld for all young people, regardless of gender, socio-economic status, location and other disparities.

Skills mismatch was seen as a persistent and significant challenge throughout the region, emphasizing the importance of accessible, relevant and quality education to all starting from the earliest years of schooling as a critical first step towards skills training, higher education and ultimately productive employment. Beyond these challenges, many countries also grapple with socio-cultural attitudes (including gender disparities) which steer children through, or push many out of the school or technical training systems and hamper their future employment prospects.

To read many of the solutions that have already been introduced in the region and view the consolidated reply of this discussion forum, please [click here](#).

The third e-discussion forum of the APYouthNet will begin on November 23 and will focus on the rights and conditions of young workers. More details can be found at <http://ap-youthnet.ilobkk.or.th>.

## **SCHOOL BOARDING HOUSES ENSURE LOCAL ETHNIC MINORITY CHILDREN COMPLETE THEIR EDUCATION**

By Nguyen Xuan Vu, Plan Asia

Dinh Thi Ha, a girl from Monic village in Vietnam, faces greater difficulties than many attending school. Her village lies in Son Ky, a mountainous commune in Son Ha district. The ethnic minority community is very poor and relies on rice cultivation and forestry agriculture for their limited income. Each day, it takes Dinh Thi Ha and her schoolmates six hours each way to walk to school along dirt tracks and across hazardous waterways. The physical effort of making the perilous trip takes a greater toll on girls at the school. As a result, 16 to 29 per cent of children, mostly girls, drop out of secondary school each year, choosing to stay at home and help their parents on the land.



In order to ensure children in remote communities stay in school and receive their right to a proper education, Plan Vietnam in Quang Ngai province supported the community in the construction of a boarding area. Funded by the Lotte Corporation in partnership with Plan, the project involved building a boarding school with 12 rooms and a kitchen enabling approximately 100 children to board at the school. Technical support was

provided by Plan Vietnam staff with combined efforts from the local community and relevant agencies ensuring true ownership of the project remained with the local community.

On June 22, 2009 the boarding houses were officially handed over to the Son Ky community to the enthusiasm of students. *"I am very excited because next school year, my friends and I don't mind travelling to school anymore; we have a place to stay,"* said Dinh Thi Ha, a girl in class 7A from Monic village.

Teachers have noticed significant changes as well. The project has promoted the importance of education in the village and children are coming to school with a renewed vigour to learn. *"This is a fantastic opportunity for the children whose houses are far away from school to continue their education,"* said Mr. Nguyen Van Binh, headmaster of Son Ky secondary school.

Following the opening of the boarding houses, 63 students immediately registered to stay. The percentage of students dropping out has reduced dramatically to less than 5 per cent for the coming school year. Furthermore, the boarding house construction has drawn great attention and support from local organisations including the district and commune People's Committee. The Committee now provides 15 kg of rice and 144,000 Vietnamese Dong (US \$8) per month to each student. The Son Ky People's Committee has committed to carrying out necessary security for the safety of students staying at the boarding house of Son Ky secondary school. Furthermore, they have mobilised local people to plant trees around the school to create a healthy environment for the children.

In addition to technical support, Plan Vietnam has supported the school by creating a stimulating environment in which the children can learn with child-friendly chairs, tables and books for a library. The school yard now includes a playground and sport equipment for the students. Community leaders and teachers have participated in training courses to effectively manage and maintain the boarding school. Students, especially those who board at the school, have received life skills training so that they feel more confident about staying away from home. Parents have also received information about the boarding school to ensure that they know their children are being well looked after.

The Son Ky school boarding house construction project has attracted the participation and support of not only authorities, but also parents and community members. It is planned that this successful model will be replicated in other remote areas allowing for more ethnic minority children to reach their full potential.

## THAI PRIME MINISTER JOINS STUDENTS IN RAISING THEIR VOICES TO END VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL

By Emma Miall, Plan Asia

Children involved in Plan Asia's Young Hearts projects in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam have recruited Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva in their call to stop violence in schools.

Prime Minister Vejjajiva joined the youths in Bangkok at the Young Hearts Youth Arts & Media Festival - to end violence against children in schools - where he added his voice to the youths' call for their right to an education free from fear. The festival is part of Plan's global [Learn Without Fear campaign](#) which was launched after research conducted by Plan exposed the extent of the pandemic of violence, particularly sexual and gender-based violence, in schools across Asia.

Leah Grace Bañares from the Philippines said, "We were inspired to produce and, in that process, we were able to understand more the conditions of fellow children who, like us, are faced with a lot of challenges in education. Our works produced under the Young Hearts project will help shape opinions of others that could make a change in the life of us children."

Thailand's Children and Family Protection Centre, part of the Ministry of Education, revealed that every week at least one teacher sexually abuses a student (UN, Violence Against Children: Regional Consultation in East Asia and the Pacific, 2005).

The real figure is certainly much higher as many girls are discouraged from speaking out. Research showed sexual violence was exerted by both girls' teachers and their fellow students and included 'sex for grades' by which teachers procure sex from girls in exchange for high marks. Sexual abuse is emerging as a major contributing factor to the gender disparity that exists in schools in Asia as girls drop out to escape it.

Under the Young Hearts project, such children received training by media professionals to provide them with the tools they need to speak out through youth media. On display was an impressive showcase of films, radio pieces, musical performances, short stories and visual arts pieces produced by them that provided an insight into their experiences of violence in schools.

Prime Minister Vejjajiva toured the exhibition, impressed by the talents of the young artists. He then demonstrated how these youths can further make themselves heard when he joined them in a social media workshop at the festival, and answered their questions online via [his Twitter account](#), demonstrating for them in real time how social media can be used to spread a message to the world. He signed a pledge to support young people as they raise their voices through youth media and to help end violence in schools.

Sisil, a girl from Indonesia, said: "It's really thrilling. It makes it all worth it. When I see the crowd's reaction and they are all so enthusiastic about our performance, all the tiredness and all the sweat doesn't mean anything anymore."

Soraya, a girl from Thailand added, "I feel special when people see our film. We have met the children here at the festival through youth media. This is our passport to go around the world."

### JOIN OUR MAILING LIST

In an effort to become a potential resource for the region, we have endorsed a joint annual work plan for 2009 that includes activities to strengthen communication and information sharing functions.

Sign up to be a part of our regional mailing list to receive and share updates and information on regional and global publications, resources and activities on girls' education and gender in education. To subscribe, click [here](#).

## PARTNER PROFILES

**Plan International:** Founded over 70 years ago, Plan is one of the oldest and largest children's development organizations in the world. Plan covers 13 countries in Asia to promote child rights and lift millions of children out of poverty. One of their core program areas is Education where they actively reach out to children who have never been to school or who have dropped out and offer them the chance of a quality education. They are also working to break down the barriers that prevent many girls from being educated and have set up projects to help thousands of them into school.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

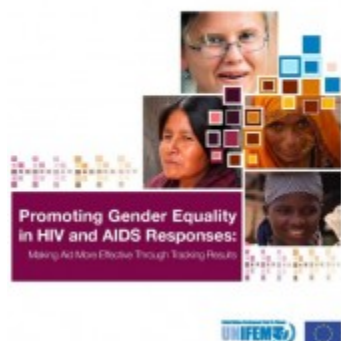
UNESCAP High-level intergovernmental meeting to review regional implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. November 16-18. Bangkok, Thailand

UNGEI Global Advisory Committee Meeting. December 7-8. Paris, France

EAP UNGEI Meeting. December 14. Bangkok, Thailand

## FEATURED RESOURCE

### **Promoting Gender Equality in HIV and AIDS Response: Making Aid More Effective in Tracking Response**



While a majority of countries have policies on HIV and AIDS, it is unclear to what extent HIV and AIDS funding and current aid flows are indeed "effective" in improving the lives of women and girls and achieving gender equality. As developing countries and donor partners re-focus development assistance around principles of national ownership and coordination, it is critical to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment are central to the aid effectiveness agenda on HIV and AIDS.

[http://unifem.org/materials/item\\_detail.php?ProductID=152#](http://unifem.org/materials/item_detail.php?ProductID=152#)

## RESOURCES

[Making Education Work: The Gender Dimension of the School to Work Transition](#) by EAP UNGEI, 2009  
[Girls' Education in the 21st Century: Gender Equality, Empowerment, and Economic Growth](#) by World Bank, 2009

[A Matter of Magnitude: The Impact of the Economic Crisis on Women and Children in South Asia](#) by UNICEF, 2009

[Achieving Gender Equality in Education: Progress Towards 2015 East Asia and Pacific Snapshot](#) by UNICEF EAPRO, with EAP UNGEI, 2009

[Child-Friendly Schools Manual](#) by UNICEF, 2009

[World Day Against Child Labour 2009 - End Child Labour](#) by ILO

[Towards Gender Equality in Education: Progress and Challenges in Asia-Pacific Region](#) by UNGEI, 2009

[Resource Guide on Gender and Climate Change](#) by UNDP, 2009

[Images of Girls' and Girls' Education: 'Reviewing' and Rethinking](#) by UNICEF, Dr. Jackie Kirk, Dr. Cathryn Magno, 2009