In first person

All too often the situation of girls and education are represented with numbers rather than stories. Statistics are used to explain why education is a good investment, which often times takes the human element out of the entire process. Why should we invest in education? Sample answers may include, ‘each additional year of schooling can increase an individual’s income by 10 per cent’ or ‘increasing the number of women with secondary education by 1 per cent can increase annual per capita economic growth by 0.3 per cent’.1

Although it is critical to bolster every argument with data and evidence, quantifying the situation does not help us visualize anything more than a pie chart or a line graph - each life in that fold is just replaced by a figure. As of 2010 in the EAP region, there were 2.9 million girls of primary school age and 3.2 million girls of lower secondary school age who remain out of school.2 Those are big numbers, but what does it feel like to be one of those girls? Or better yet, what does it feel like to have the opportunity to NOT be one of those girls?

As with all EAP UNGEI newsletters, we intend to highlight the benefits of education; however, in this commemorative edition, we aim to personify these reasons and give young girls a space to tell us in first person, what education means to them and how it has affected their lives. In honor of the inauguration of International Day of the Girl Child on the 11th of October, we hope that you will be inspired by the stories of these girls …and their voices.

Disclaimer: The responsibility for all facts, opinions, and statements of this newsletter is that of the authors. Submissions do not necessarily represent the views of EAP UNGEI partners/members. The EAP UNGEI does not endorse the accuracy or reliability of any facts, opinions, statements or other information provided by the authors.
International Day of the Girl Child in the EAP Region!

On the 11th of October, EAP UNGEI joined the international community to ring in the inauguration of International Day of the Girl Child. We united with all of our partners in the region to celebrate with various activities, and most notably, Plan Thailand and EAP UNGEI co-hosted a high-level event to mark the Day and also unveil findings from Plan’s “Because I am a Girl” 2012 Report which focuses on girls and education.

The UN General Assembly declared this special day to underline the situation of girls around the world. The theme for this year’s Day was child marriage and the detrimental effects that it can have on a girl’s (and boy’s) life. The ‘girl child’ specifically refers to those under the age of 18, who often faces unique challenges compared to boys and compared to women. Being a girl is often met with many obstacles such as deep-seated prejudices, gender-based violence, child labour, discrimination and child marriage.

As the UN Girls’ Education Initiative, this Day was ecstatically welcomed with open arms. The network jointly released a statement with the South Asia Regional UNGEI along with fact sheets on child marriage in both regions. An opinion piece, which was co-authored by Plan Thailand and EAP UNGEI featured in various news sources including the Bangkok Post.

The high-level event held in Bangkok on the 11th of October was presided over by Her Excellency Mrs. Nalinee Taveesin, Minister from the Office of the Prime Minister of Thailand. Maja Cubarrubia, (Plan International Thailand, Country Director), Mark Pierce (Plan Asia Regional Office, Regional Director) and Chemba Raghavan (Regional Focal Point for EAP UNGEI) joined the Minister on stage to rally the audience and the public at large to “raise their hands in support of girls’ education”. Others in attendance included members of embassies, international organizations, boys and girls from hill tribe communities in Thailand, and of course, UNGEI members.

A booth was set up to distribute UNGEI partners’ resources as well as UNGEI related materials. Plan Thailand also organized a photo exhibition displaying successful women and organized various activities including mini-concerts and screening of short films by University students, which were carried out over the course of the following three days. Statements from UNGEI partners released on the Day can also be found below.

It is our hope that International Day of the Girl Child will help bring more attention to issues that affect girls - but let us not wait until the Day comes around again next year to take action… We can all start now!

Joint statements released by our partners:

- **EAP/SA UNGEI joint statement**
- **UNESCO**
- **UNWomen, UNICEF, & UNFPA**
- **World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts**
Honoring Skills of Young People to Secure Jobs, as the ‘Youth Bulge’ Enters the Workforce

By: Plan International

CHIANG RAI, Thailand (April 2012) — Twenty-three-year-old Meetee Porsae has worked low-paid odd jobs since the tender age of 12 to support her frail parents and two younger sisters, and to help pay for the education of her older brother. Until recently, she did not even know how to read or write.

“I never went to school because my family couldn’t afford it. I have an older brother, and he was chosen to go to school instead of me. I felt a bit sad, but I knew that my parents needed me to help them,” said the young woman, a stateless member of the ethnic minority from a hill tribe in Thailand’s northern Chiang Rai province.

“However, my brother finished only grade 9, and then he got married and left the house… I knew that if my brother left the house, the burden would fall upon me as the oldest daughter. It is difficult to get a job in my area, as I have no identity card to prove that I was born in Thailand, so I couldn’t dream of any future.”

Meetee is one of the 1.3 billion young people between the ages of 15 and 24 who are transitioning from adolescence into adulthood and entering the global adult workforce over the next decade. This under-25 “youth bulge” — amounting to half the world’s population and 60 per cent of some developing countries — represents the largest cohort of job seekers ever.

However, only 300 million new jobs are expected to be created, and to make matters worse, most of these young people come from poor households with scarce resources. Their future will likely hold few opportunities and continued poverty, making them vulnerable to exploitation, violence and extremism.

Plan International is tackling this challenge by providing vocational training for young people in the poorest communities around the world. In Asia, Plan is focusing in particular on those who face discrimination and are marginalized, including girls and young women, ethnic minorities and stateless people.

In 2011, Plan trained 165,148 people in agricultural, vocational and business skills. Here are the stories and voices of young people Plan has trained in Thailand, Timor-Leste and Indonesia.

Stateless and illegal

Meetee is one of more than one million stateless people in Thailand, who are undocumented and lack basic rights.

“Most of the stateless are not able to access government services like health, and they cannot travel, get jobs or education because they are not Thai citizens and do not have birth certificates,” said Chanchai Thongsumrit, a vocational training consultant for Plan Thailand. He noted that for young women, it is harder to find work, putting them at risk for child labour and human trafficking.

Meetee’s first job, at age 12, was at a factory in Bangkok, where she earned US$125 a month. At 14, she was back in Chiang Rai, selling clothes for $80 a month. Her boss raised her salary and by the end of four years on the job, she was earning $150 a month.

“It was so difficult for me to do other jobs because I was unable to read and write, so I had no choice. Any job that earned me money, I had to do it,” Meetee said.

At 17, she landed a job at a hotel in Chiang Rai, where she cleaned, washed...
and helped out in the lobby and restaurant, still earning $150 a month.

Then the head of her village told her that Plan Thailand was looking for 30 young women who were stateless or from poor families to be trained, for four months, at no cost to the women, at the Chiangsaen International Institute for Skill Development in Hotel Management.

She signed up for the programme – Plan’s Livelihood Advancement Business School (LABS) – and learned about working in restaurants, making hotel beds, and cooking. She also received support for formal education, individual counseling and mentoring.

After the course, she was promoted to officer at the lobby front desk, and got a hefty raise to $250 a month, enabling her to better support her family and even pay for her younger sisters’ education.

“It was sometimes difficult for me to read and write, but the school provides knowledge step by step,” Meetee said. “Although I am stateless, I have no more worries about my future because I have a good job to support my family.”

Young journalists
Plan in Timor-Leste is working on a number of projects that aim to provide skills and employment opportunities to young people in the capital and beyond.

Acacio Pinto, 25, the child of subsistence farmers, is a beneficiary of one of those projects. He grew up in Lautem, a poor, rural area about 6 hours’ drive from the capital. His parents did not have enough money for him to go to school beyond the second grade, so he dropped out and started selling firewood in a local market.

Years later, when he heard of a Plan scheme through the youth council in his district to train young journalists and place them with a local radio station he jumped at the chance.

Acacio and 11 other young people spent three months learning reporting and computer skills at Lautem Community Radio station. Plan organized the training and provided computers, voice recorders and other equipment.

When the Timor-Leste Media Development Centre (TLMDC) in Dili contacted Radio Lautem looking for new staff, Acacio’s boss recommended him.

“At first, I was a little bit scared,” he says. It was a big challenge for a “country boy,” as Acacio puts it, to come into the big city. “I knew there would be a lot of competition, and I would have to meet important people, like government officials. So I was scared, but I was happy, too.”

Easier to get a job
When 19-year-old Budi “Santi” Susanti graduated from high school last year, her father thought it was time for her to get married.

She took on a factory job to earn some money, but after four months, she quit because the hard work and the four-hour commute from her home in Grobogan district in Indonesia’s Central Java province were not worth the low pay.

“In my mind, after graduating from school I had to get a job because my parents’ financial condition is poor. I did not want to burden them, but I know that looking for a job does not mean I can take up any work. Without skills and experience I couldn’t get a decent job,” Santi said.

Then one of her friends invited her to join the Plan-supported Youth Economic Empowerment (YEE) programme. After three months of unemployment, Santi decided to sign up, and then spent four to five hours a day in the five-week programme to learn communication, self-confidence and entrepreneurship.

Launched 2010 and now implemented in Grobogan and Rembang districts of Central Java, and Lembata in East Nusa Tenggara, the programme teams up with employers to provide the knowledge and skills needed.

Over the first three years, YEE aims to assist 4,000 young adults, 15-29 years old – 80 percent of them women, for whom it is more difficult to enter the labour market. They have fewer employment opportunities, and most young women currently work in informal, low-wage jobs.

According to Plan Indonesia, one YEE session had 88 participants – about half of whom landed jobs, including Santi.

“I did not have to wait long. After completing the training, I received two job interviews,” Santi said.

After interviewing with a coffee production company, she was asked to start work the following week as an operator.
I was born into a large low-income family and have two older sisters and three younger brothers. When I was in primary school, I spent my free time selling bread in the market in order to make money to pay for my studies. I used all the money that I made to pay for my school supplies until I finished high school.

When I was in school, my dad always told me he didn’t have any wealth to pass on to me so I should focus on my studies because it would give me a good job. I believed education could provide me with an even brighter future if I could go beyond high school, but we were faced with a lot of financial problems that threatened my future of going to university. I was afraid I would be jobless and unable to compete with other people who had bachelor’s degrees.

I finally found financial support, which put me through university and now I am happy that I have come this far and graduated. In October 2011, I finished all my courses and because I had more confidence in myself from all the knowledge I gained, I applied for jobs in Cambodia, in both the public and private sectors. I am now working at a Japanese-funded NGO. I know I could not have gotten this job if I did not graduate from university.

Now I can dream a bigger future for my family and myself, I’m even looking into going on to complete a Master’s degree. Education is so important for everyone, this I know from my own experience, because without it I may still be selling bread in the market.

Baking for a Brighter Future

By: Kundeoun So, Cambodia

I was born into a large low-income family and have two older sisters and three younger brothers. When I was in primary school, I spent my free time selling bread in the market in order to make money to pay for my studies. I used all the money that I made to pay for my school supplies until I finished high school.

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Now I can dream a bigger future for my family and myself, I’m even looking into going on to complete a Master’s degree. Education is so important for everyone, this I know from my own experience, because without it I may still be selling bread in the market.
Education and Learning Go Hand-in-Hand

By: Thamonwan Na Nakara (Praewa). A 20 year old active Girl Guide member of The Girl Guides (Girl Scouts) Association of Thailand and a law student studying at Chulalongkorn University.

Education and learning are part of each other. Education is what someone else does (or tries to do) for you, while learning is what you do for yourself.

I believe that education is a tool that pertains to me in learning something. Education has empowered me since it guides me in the right way by giving the information that I need or choose to learn. Being educated has opened more doors of opportunities for me and has helped me to accomplish my goals.

For example, I discovered that I enjoyed learning basic law lessons in high school and this gave me the idea that I wanted to be a lawyer in the future.

By being educated, I am able to go to a good university, be surrounded by good friends and a good environment. Also, education gives me a better perspective of the things that happen around me and helps me make better and smarter decisions both as an individual and as part of an entity.

Recently my little cousin (who is 10 years old) and I watched the news on TV reporting that the police arrested female teenage prostitutes who had been trafficked from the Northern part of Thailand and my cousin wondered why those female teenagers decided to do that “bad thing”. So I asked her back “how do you know that they are doing is bad?” and she answered, “because everyone told me that it is bad--my teacher, my parents, textbooks and TV shows. Also, we can see from the news every day that those people are suffering and they are not living a happy life” So I asked her another question, “do you think that those people have the opportunities like you to listen to their teachers or their parents, to read from textbooks or to watch TV shows, so that they know before they decide to do such things?” There was a silence and she quietly said “No and I guess although those people know what they are doing, they have no choice. They have to do it because they are poor and they can only think of a few ways to make money for a living.”

After discussing the situation together, my little cousin said she now realizes how important it is for everyone to be educated.
Why Education is Important to Me…

By: Pinyada Thongrom, 18 years old, Faculty of Medicine Ramathibodi Hospital Mahidol University and a member The Girl Guide (Girl Scouts) Association of Thailand

Education has played a vital role in my daily life. School is the institution where I understand why education is so important, I learn to read, write and I become literate. I think education gives me knowledge of the things around me. It has taught me how to lead a reasonable life. Education makes me capable of interpreting things rightly. It is not just about lessons in textbooks but it is about the lessons of life.

Education is the key to success for me. It's important because it provides me with all that is needed to make my dreams come true. Having a good education can help me to pursue my dream of being a doctor. I am fascinated by the human body and I think one of the factors that led me to medicine as a career was that I believe it is one thing I will be truly good at and most interested in. The money, job security, and altruistic reasons definitely played a part and narrowed my choice from everything in biology down to medicine. Moreover, I want to be a role model for my younger siblings and for everyone who is striving to better the mselves.

Education is an extremely critical part of my life. By having a decent education, my life can enhance the lives of others. After I graduate, I can help other people who suffer from diseases and create a better quality of life for them.

By: Napassorn Wattanasiri is 17 years old from Yothinburana School and a member of The Girl Guides (Girl Scouts) Association of Thailand

The meaning of the word “education” in my understanding is the learning of mankind. How we learn something or gain something – it’s not just only words on paper, not just text or pictures - but it includes life skills. Education is important for everyone. It creates humanity, viewpoints and a way of life.

“Humans always want to improve themselves by learning.”

“Why is education so important?” this is the question that always comes to my mind. Education creates humanity, your country and future. In my opinion it’s the basics of life and direction for the future. Moreover it makes me chase my dreams and makes them come true. It makes me think about the questions: “How can I improve my country?”, “How can I improve my life?” and “How to improve human quality?” I think education created everything.

I used to think that education was a competition, but now I changed my attitude. Education is a “chance”. Many people around the world want education, but only some of them can get it. So when I receive education, I get a chance. I’ll use my chance to create a chance for other people.
My name is Chok Somborin, I am 53 years old and I live in Preah Vihea province. When I was young I didn’t have the chance to study much because my family lived in a liberated area, which had been controlled by the Khmer Rouge since 1970.

During the Khmer Rouge regime, I and seven other women who lived in the same mobile unit were forced to marry men we didn’t know in a wedding ceremony where each couple was asked to just hold hands and determine to live together as husband and wife. Then, we were not allowed to live together happily; instead, we were required to live separately according to our own work.

On the Victory Day of 7 January 1979, when the Pol Pot regime was defeated, my family, as well as many other families in the nation, had only empty hands. I had no wealth, and I was pregnant with my first baby. At that time, my husband was abducted by the Khmer Rouge soldiers to transport food. This situation made me so hopeless.

Three months later hope returned because the Khmer Rouge had released my husband. In 1981, I gave birth to my baby boy. My husband and I were discussing what our son’s future would be like as we were so poor. At that time, my husband decided to get a job as a rice mill factory worker leaving me alone to take care of the small baby. One year later, I decided to move to live with my husband in the rice mill factory compound. Working at the factory, my husband only got 60 riels per month because he was illiterate and had no real skills. For me, I had to wake up very early and travelled very far to buy fish to sell. In 1994 I had a total of 9 children, but my twins passed away due to premature birth. Being a rice mill factory worker and a fishmonger could not adequately support our living, so we both changed our jobs to grow vegetables and move from one place to another to sell Khmer noodles. No matter how tired we were, we always encouraged each other for the future of our children. In 1996, I gave birth to my eleventh child who is the youngest one. Meanwhile, my husband fell seriously ill, which made me so frightened because I was both expecting a baby and had no money to pay for the treatment or take him to the hospital in Phnom Penh. Every night I would cry looking at all my children sleeping in a row in a broken thatched roof hut.

Luckily, my husband recovered three months later, making me very happy. However, our living was still full of hardship since we had to support the children to go to school and pay for all the daily expenses. In 1997, I lost my other lovely child, the 10th one, due to a serious illness. Therefore, I only have 8 children left (5 boys and 3 girls).

Our job growing vegetables and selling Khmer noodles could no longer support our family's living, so I took a loan to buy a rice mill and open a business to support my children’s schooling. I was always determined to do whatever I could to enable all of my children to go to college. I am poor, but I have a good husband and children, after they came back from school all my children always helped out with everything to ease the difficulties in the family. In 2000, my two sons passed the exam to become high school teachers. One year later, they won scholarships to study at the National Institution of Management. At that time, I was too excited.

In 2003, my third son and my fourth daughter also passed the exam to study at college in Phnom Penh. Our most difficult problem then was lack of money to support the three children’s studies, so I had to sell some part of my farmland and my house. The people in the community insulted me, saying that I was too poor to sell my property to send my kids to school, and wondered how I was going to have anything left for my little children to

I patiently did whatever I could to make sure my kids finished college.
eat if all my property was sold. I didn’t respond to the insult. Instead, I patiently did whatever I could to make sure my kids finished college.

I decided to take on a new job as a cook for parties and other ceremonies. Before I became a cook, I served at restaurants and learned how to cook from cookbooks and from asking others. I slept very little at night as I had to wake up very early in the morning to work. With my effort, attention to the job and cooperation from my husband my cooking business grew and helped to improve our living standards. Now, I could realize my dream: by 2006, my three kids had returned from Phnom Penh. My two sons work at World Vision; my third son works at ACLEDA bank; and my fourth daughter is a mathematics teacher. In 2008, my fifth daughter attended Asia-Europe University, majoring in English. My sixth daughter studied at the Faculty of Business at Pannasastra University of Cambodia and my seventh daughter and eighth son are studying grade 11 near home.

I hope all my children will finish college and get good jobs, and that my job as a chef will become more popular in the near future. For people in the village, after they saw my family getting better, each family followed my model and started to send their kids to colleges as well. Therefore, I am a role model for my village and for other women. It is my determination and perseverance that enabled me to achieve such proud outcomes in my life.

“Diligence brings success”
Life’s Struggle and Courage

*Chapter from “Women and Girls in their Struggle for Success” by Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Kingdom of Cambodia in cooperation with the NGO Partnership organization, UNESCO and its partners

Twenty-year-old Kuon Soknan is a remarkable young woman. Born with a disability, which would have tested the toughest brave heart, Soknan talks about her life story in a grounded and positive way. Her unwavering goal in life is to work with people with disabilities.

Kuon Soknan’s optimism is amazing. “I believe each one of us can carve our own destiny provided we realize that there are some things you cannot change and there are some things that you must change,” she says with poise.

“I was born on September 9, 1990 to parents who are not educated and are poor. My father was a soldier in the Cambodian army, but then his health started failing him and he had to leave the army. With eight mouths to feed at home and no job, each day was a struggle for the family. Given the situation, education was not a priority for my parents. As a result, my three brothers were forced to drop out of school and take up odd jobs. However, for some strange reason, my younger sister and I were not forced to drop out of school at that time. Do not get me wrong, we were not being indulged. My parents did not have to pay our fees and more importantly the school was almost in our backyard! So as long as we managed the household work and school work, we were allowed to continue with our studies. I guess they were also too tired at the end of a day to worry about what we were doing.

In a way, this proved to be a blessing. I got to study and complete fifth grade. So while my family worked hard just to complete/get through the day, I worked hard because I realized very early in my life that only education could lift me out of this situation.”

For the first time in our long conversation Soknan referred to her disability, “I have a problem commuting. I am dependent on others to go to school.”

“When our school was at the back of our house, my younger sister would push me in a wooden wheelchair, which was given to me by a local NGO. From the very beginning, my parents always thought educating me was a waste. So I was not sent to school like other children of my age. It was when my younger sister started going to school that I realized that I was being deprived of something. I started to cry and it made life difficult for everyone at home for not sending me to school. Finally my parents gave in, and I guess it was more out of convenience for they felt leaving me at home alone would be more of a problem.

Schooling was tough. For starters, I had to learn to write with my toes and worse I also had to deal with people’s curious stares and sometimes even nasty comments. However, the most painful part of it was that no one wanted to be my friend. With my sister, Kimsay by my side, I slowly learnt to overcome each of these problems. And as I grew older, I learnt what I could not control or change, I had to ignore. I also found solace in my books. Books became my best friend.

When I passed Grade 5 and insisted that I be sent to secondary school, my mother turned hostile! The new school was far from our house and since my younger sister had one more year to complete her primary schooling; my parents told me without mincing any words that I would have to give up my studies and just sit at home!

I felt betrayed and discriminated against. Even today, I can recollect with great clarity my frustration and anger at being deprived of going to school just because no one wanted to take me there. Once again, I just sat back at
home and waited a whole year for Kimsay to complete her primary school. During this time, I worked on my mathematics. I always found this subject to be beyond my grasp and with no one to guide me at home it continued to daunt me, until one of the teachers who passed by our house each morning noticed me struggling and volunteered to teach me - I must add here that I have been fortunate because most of my teachers have been very kind to me. Some of them went out of their way to ensure I was keeping pace with the rest of the class.

When my sister finally passed primary school and joined the secondary school a not too far away from our house I was the happiest person because I presumed I would now be able to go to school. However, much to my shock, my parents refused to allow me to join. Their logic was that school was about ten kilometers away from where we lived and since I was dependent on others to travel, carrying me to school every day was not possible for my sister. I was devastated. I stopped eating food and was feeling very helpless and depressed. Kimsay too was equally upset and helpless. One day, she told her teacher about me. This was also the same time when Room to Read staff were recruiting scholars in her school. I am not sure how it happened but the next week a teacher along with a Room to Read staff member visited our home. As a special case, both Kimsay and I were enrolled and Kimsay was given a bicycle! “This was perhaps the happiest day in our lives for now we could travel to school.

Studying in the same class as my sister has been a blessing to me. Since I get colds and flu frequently I sometimes miss classes. At such times, my sister’s class notes are a big help to me. Of course she is not able to get any help from me if she falls ill as I am unable to go to school on those days!

I am happiest when I am in school but I also feel very sad that my younger sister is burdened with this responsibility of taking me to school each day. This is more so these days as she is not keeping too well and has been vomiting periodically. My mother holds me responsible for this and she never fails to tell me that Kimsay is too frail to pull my weight. I too feel guilty, especially during the monsoon season when the roads are slushy and one cannot pedal easily. So Kimsay has to push the cycle with me sitting on it for a good part of the journey.

I am caught in a dilemma as this is my final year of schooling and I really do not want to give up now. Kimsay is supportive despite all her problems. But I really wish I could do something to make it easier for her. We often laugh when we should be crying and wish for a magic wand! On the top of our wish list is a motorized wheel chair so that both Kimsay and I can travel in style! But until then, we both have to be brave and do what it takes!”

“School is for everyone!”
I Feel the Same Way Too: A Story from Africa

Knowledge and education know no borders. For this commemorative edition, we have chosen to include this article from Zambia to share and learn more from our friends from another corner of the world.

By: Marjory from Lusaka, Zambia (submitted by Room to Read)

I’m the first of three children. My dad left Mum for another woman when I was quite little, but I was old enough to know and feel the unpleasantness of the situation. It hurt to see Mum worry and cry most of the time, and also to see her struggle with the pressure of taking care of my little brothers and me.

It also affected me academically. Since Mum could not afford my school fees, I would stay out of school for long periods of time. I began to feel bitterness toward my dad because each time I went to ask him for things for school, he would not give them to me. All I got from Dad were empty promises. When I’d see girls in my neighborhood hurrying off to school I would think, ‘Those girls will have a better life than mine after they get educated. They will live in big cities where there is civilization, while I will remain a miserable illiterate villager.’

What encouraged me was that Mum went back to school! She was one of the beneficiaries of the Go-Back-to-School re-entry policy put in place by the Zambian Ministry of Education. The government wanted girls that got pregnant while in school to be able to continue with their education, and my mum had dropped out of school when she got pregnant with me, shortly after passing her 9th grade exams and marrying my father.

In 2003, Mum went back to school. She was in 10th grade while I was just starting 1st grade at the same school! People used to laugh and make fun of her, but she ignored them and remained focused.

I remember her telling me that she didn’t care what other people said because she knew if she got educated, she would then liberate us from our dire situation. It was not easy for Mum but she completed 12th grade with very good results. And, she ended up getting offered a job after competing against four male applicants for the position.

She is now working in Lusaka and training to be a teacher—which is why my brothers and I live with our auntie. Mum’s fighting spirit encouraged me, but the greatest encouragement in my education has been Room to Read. When representatives from Room to Read came to our 6th grade class one day in 2008 to tell us about the Girls’ Education program, I thought they were joking. I started believing them when they told me I was one of the 93 girls chosen to be on the program. And I believed them even more when they gave me a uniform and took me and the rest of the girls to David Kaunda School for one week during the December school holiday for life skills training. There, we learned a lot about assertiveness, goal-setting, decision-making and HIV/AIDS prevention, among other things.

One big challenge has been the early sexual relationships going on at my school. Many girls are pregnant and have dropped out of school. I try to advise my friends to see the importance of education but sometimes they don’t listen. As for me, I have learned to be assertive and that has been very helpful for this kind of challenge. I have told several boys in our school who have made advances that I’m in school to learn, and that I want to complete school and not be disturbed by any boy!

I want to be a lawyer so that I can help to bring law and order to disorganized communities. It will also be a way to show Room to Read that they did not waste their resources on me, and that I appreciate this rare opportunity that they have provided me.
Related resources

**Because I am a Girl, State of the World’s Girls 2012: Learning for Life**  
By: Plan International

**Global Monitoring Report 2012, Youth and Skills: Putting Education to Work**  
By: UNESCO

**Women and Girls in their Struggle for Success**  
By: Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Kingdom of Cambodia in cooperation with the NGO Partnership organization, UNESCO and its partners

**East Asia and Pacific Fact Sheet: End Child Marriage**  
By: EAP/SA UNGEI

**Marrying too Young**  
By: UNFPA

**South Asia Fact Sheet: End Child Marriage**  
By: EAP/SA UNGEI

**Video: My Eyes Opened, A New World!**  
By: Aide et Action

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EAP UNGEI Editorial Board

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