

UNGEI *GirlsEd-Net* eDiscussion #6: Equity, Gender and Quality in Education in Asia and the Pacific

Details of this eDiscussion can be found here: http://www.ungei.org/listserve/index_1808.html

Dear participants in the e-discussion regarding Equity, Gender and Quality in Education in Asia and the Pacific,

I want to thank all who have contributed to our discussion last week. Your inputs are very helpful because they are based on experience on the ground and can serve to remind all of us at the Global Advisory Committee (GAC) of UNGEI of whom we are working for, ultimately.

Babar Khan reminds us of the importance of involving real stakeholders in the decision making process, especially, the teachers experiencing harsh and precarious rural realities, and I might add, the children and their parents too. We need awareness raising campaign on a grand scale that will make people see girls' education as investment and not as mere expenditure, let alone wastage.

Many thanks to Sushil Bhardwaj who took the time to send in his own list of reasons why children are not in school: poverty, distance from school and a whole host of other reasons connected to poverty: child and/or forced marriage, absence of female positive role models and the belief that parents will have problems marrying off educated girls. Sushil dwells on the problems connected to societal views of girls and women: parent's fear for girls' safety or for girls falling preys of sexual abuses which will ruin their chances for marriages. He also mentions the importance of engaging with men so that they, too, are committed to educating girls and women, especially their wives and daughters. Sushil also emphasises the need for education to empower girls so that, when educated, they take charge of their own incomes and spending and other important decisions in their lives. There might also be a backlash, he warns us, when empowering women becomes a threat to the stability of the home. Sushil mentioned the well documented fact, that, when having access to learning, girls do perform well. Sex stereotypes, Sushil says, present a hindrance to girls' choices of subject to pursue as well as lacks of creativity of the school managers. Sushil identifies limited funding for education in many countries as one reason why MDGs on education will not be met . But money is not everything. Quality of education is also important. This depends on teachers' quality and commitment which is only possible when teachers are encouraged and well supported.

And dear Sereima, thanks for letting us hear your voice from very far away Fiji. Like Babar and Sushil, Sereima voice comes loud and clear from the ground. Sereima brings in another cruel reality of teenage pregnancy and what it means to girls in the Pacific. She believes that we need to engage with the teenagers themselves in working out the solutions for them. She feels it necessary to recognise the importance of building self esteem and to believe in their genuine desire and potential to learn and to have a better future. This issue could only be solved through a culturally sensitive and inclusive participation of all stake holders. Sereima recalled her experience in working in Fiji and Vanuatu that, there, like in other countries, the community are keen to learn what they perceive to be critically necessary and relate to their own lives. Sereima's inputs remind us of the other side of the coin- literacy- and how to link the contents of adult literacy to children's education.

An independent researcher from Hong Kong sent in a brief but powerful message that love and care are at the core of good education. Thanks so much for that. Emotional development is an area that is often overlooked as one keeps one's eyes on the goal of economic development.

Love, compassion, understanding, tolerance, harmony do play a determining role on whether children, girls and boys, learn well.

Last week's contributions raise some questions in my mind:

1. What role should education play in helping girls, and boys, develop the values that will help them live a happy and contented life?
2. Is it useful to overhaul curriculum and materials so that they are gender sensitive and empowering? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. What are some good examples of programmes that empower girls and their communities?
4. What are your experience in dealing with situations where boys are at a disadvantage instead of girls?

Please do write in and let us know what you think. We take your comments seriously. You have till 5 June to make your inputs to the UNGEI GAC meeting next week. So hurry up and send in your comments. I hope to hear from you very soon.

Namtip Aksornkool, Senior Programme Specialist, Section for Inclusion and Quality Learning Enhancement, UNESCO
Moderator of this eDiscussion

There are many issues regarding girls' education in the region I live. One of the major reasons which hinder girls education is parents perception about girls education, they feel that girl education is not important and consumption investment. Parents are not aware of the importance of education girls and they become mothers tomorrow. Therefore, to increase the enrollment of Girls in Pakistan there is a need of awareness campaign through developing partnership with NGO. For example, Aga Khan Development Network has done a marvelous work in this regard in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. It established small NGO at village level and make them responsible to address the issues of that locality particularly education which is working well.

Another issue for girls' education and quality education is policy making. In my region policies do not match with the ground realities. These are developed in air conditioned rooms without realizing the hard condition of the rural areas where teachers do not have a chair to sit on as well as other teaching requirement. This results teachers' low motivation towards their professions. When parents are not satisfied from school and their children future is not secure, they prefer not sending their children to schools.

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Thanks for your e-mail of May 23, 2008.

May I send to you these words:-

Meritus qui Laborat. Labor vincit improbus. Omnia
vincit Amor. Amicus Humanus Generiae. Pro Bono Publico.

I think with love, care and determination, everything is possible!

Good luck & best wishes,

Sincerely,

Maryanne TP Fong

Independent researcher

Ontario, Canada

Participant in many of your UNGEI

e-discussions in Year 2007-2008

Dear Namtip Asornkool,

Thank you very much for inviting me to join the discussion. I have been teaching since 1952 and have seen the change but that is not enough and not at the pace it is needed. Each country has its own type of problems that it needs to deal with at social, climatic, economic, political and cultural level to get to Education for All goals. Lack of quality teachers is also an additional disadvantage.

I am attaching my views for what they are worth.

Children are out of school for following reasons-

1. Poverty, need to work as sibling caregiver, looking after sick elderly, need to earn the little bit one can to add to family income, agricultural need of an extra hand required at specific times.
2. Lack of school nearby, need for long walk to school, children stop going to school in rains or snow or too much heat, whatever is applicable in their climatic conditions.
3. In case of girls in addition 2 first 2 reasons, additional reasons are, sent to school till menarche then dropout pressurized by parents, child marriages in conservative regions Rajasthan, Bihar etc, lack of privacy for toilets etc, lack of lady teachers, withdrawal if family gets into financial problems, no professional training as girls need not work (is still thought of in upper middle class category, supposedly sons support the elderly parents therefore waste of money to spend on girls' education, Difficult to find a match for a girl if she gets highly qualified, lack of security.

These reasons make the number of school dropout and not reaching school high and hinder the realization of EFA goals as well as gender parity.

Girl child's education suffers first if there is violence, lack of peace, disturbances etc. The withdrawal of girls after Menarche is also related to fear of her getting involved with someone and

getting pregnant. Rumour of or a case of such kind can result in girl's withdrawals not so much in cities but in small towns and villages. There is need to educate parents and of student counseling to prevent this, both such cases as well as withdrawals.

My experience has been of parents withdrawing a girl from final year of BA when a suitable match has been found for her if the in laws to be say "She does not have to earn and so it is not necessary for her to continue her education." I have also seen some such girls join back after marriage if their husbands support the idea of an earning wife. Social mores and ideas do play a role in this; regions vary in their approach to universal education.

Government policies, here in India of offering small financial award for a girl registering in class VIII or keeping a girl child alive and yearly small amount saved for her till she reaches 18 and is educated might have some effect, which can be seen in a few years and not immediately. In cities and even in small towns women's earning power is being appreciated , but it does not empower them in most cases as their income is handled by either the mother in law or the husband and they become beasts of burden for earning, household work as well as bearing children. It is only in upper classes that empowerment can be seen to some extent. Again change is on the way- some husbands share domestic responsibilities, rearing of the children and families are small so that it is possible for both to enjoy the benefits of better life conditions, it can also result in rat race and no time for anyone with anyone. **Seeing this last aspect some do reconsider the idea of girls/women getting qualified and working and then as a reaction education of women suffers.**

As the results of secondary school recently show girls are doing very well in their studies if they do go on with it. There still are those who speak about subjects girls should or should not study. Better curricula choices would definitely be a help. Lack of imagination of the school authorities in refusing offer of computers (because according to them they had no room for adding that subject) and no action on the offer of a local resident to build a room for it, as that receiving no reply in last year and a half, is an example of uncaring attitude of, and unimaginative frame of mind of the teachers/school management.

Prediction of the President of the World Bank and the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund that the Millennium Development goals that are likely to be missed are those on health and education can not be averted looking at the meager budget allotments to these subjects in many countries. Much more is needed to improve the situation; better teachers need to be paid better, equipment costs money, mid day meal of hygienically good quality costs money, clean and safe toilets cost money. There is need to find ways and means to supplement funding for education in most of the countries that are lacking in education and health facilities. Sri Lanka has done better in education but lack of peace is detrimental in getting the best benefits from whatever has been achieved, same can be held true for many African nations. Quality education for all is possible in Peace. MDGs go together and there is interdependence.

Good practices can be seen in many areas-

One room one teacher schools can have transfer of teachers from various disciplines and overall education in primary sector would improve, teachers need to be given encouragement if they get results in keeping the number and raising quality as well as interest of the community in the small school that is there in the village. I am not against classes under the trees so long as it is possible to take shelter in bad weather and possibility of a roof over the head in a year or so. One room school can grow too. Small beginnings need not be looked down upon, only these are not to be taken as end products.

Those who are educated and from same small village if they take interest, which they do in some cases, they do become role models, exposure to slightly better way of life encourages the

students to work harder, showing visuals of possible improvements can add interest and work wonders, scholarships "merit cum need based" are of great help.

Individuals, Citizens need to come and add their bit to depend totally on Government might not be complete solution.

Sushil Bhardwaj
IFUW VP

Greetings Colleagues

To begin with the class of out-of-school-youths that I have now began with 5 girls and 10 boys. This is a great disparity. One of the stark problems here is teenage pregnancies. Girls are allowed to get back to studies after conceiving.

This is continuing to give the rights to education to the girls. However, this does not solve the problem as this is becoming a serious crisis. I have been talking to my female students some of whom were victims of this social ill. They expressed the desire then (16, 17,) to be part of the 'teenage norm' which then resulted in unwanted pregnancies which were then followed by the trauma -family, parental, societal denunciation; segregation, single parenting and so forth - which left them no choice but to quit. These are the realities.

A long-term solution of continuous family and parental education on the roles and effects/impact of quality nurturing - beyond tokenism - clearly needs to be the focus. On the other hand the strategies of resolving the crisis from the root must mean that the cultural strategies of resolving matters must be in place and therefore culturally sensitive and culturally meaningful in everyway.

It must be borne in mind that teenage pregnancies and other such social problems do stem from lack of knowledge, illiteracy, minimal education and so forth so being sensitive to their (communities, parents) ways of knowledge gain is critical. I have worked with parents and communities - urban to rural to remote - on this strategy (Fiji, Vanuatu lately in particular) and have found the genuine desire of the community (parents - men, women, Mums, Dads etc)to learn more and be educated more on critical issues that directly relate to their own lives particularly as builders of the next generation. I have worked with literacy educators also of this region on a simple, pictorial parent's booklet titled - You and Your Child: The greatest gift you can give your child is your TIME!

I have been criticised on this because colleagues have stated that parents are themselves pressed with time - in this fast economically/money-centred world!(the fundamental problem!) The work has shed a totally different view from the communities. The other continuous solution is addressing the issues and problems of teenagers directly with the teenagers themselves. First there must be a genuine belief and recognition of their self esteem (males & females) and of their innermost desire to learn for a better future. All of them have these - despite their various socio-economic backgrounds. This, I believe, is the fundamental principle - which if aspired to could woo girls and boys into the world of education - into the world of information for better living and for a better world. Well, my class now stands at 10 girls and 20 boys – Still a disparity but a gradual climb for the girls! Many thanks.

Sereima Lumelume

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