

UNGEI 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

Special Edition

In the second week of June, UNGEI will hold its first regionally focused Global Advisory Committee (GAC) meeting in Kathmandu, Nepal. The theme of the meeting will be "Equity, Gender and Quality in Education in Asia-Pacific". This eDiscussion is a way of bringing the voices of all UNGEI partners to the global meeting.

In 2005, there were about 27 million of children out-of-school in Asia and the Pacific, 61% of them girls. About two-thirds of these children live in South and West Asia. Much progress has been made in primary education, in part because more girls are going to school. Yet the number of out-of-school girls remains staggering. It is now established that girls' education is the main factor which will facilitate or hinder the realization of EFA goals.

We have already missed the 2005 goal on gender parity. Performance levels have been low among children who finish school. Only a small percentage of girls completes primary school and continues to secondary and tertiary levels - not to mention the graduate level. Many other pertinent issues in girls' education have remained almost stagnant over the past few decades.

While we seem to know about factors preventing girls (and boys) from going to school, there are details that need to come to light in each country and locality. What has research told us about these unreached children, especially girls? Is poverty the main cause of non-enrolment and drop out? What about societal attitudes towards girls' education and towards the perceived roles of girls as future women? How do violence in school, armed conflicts and natural disasters influence schooling, especially of girls? And what measures have been put in place to ensure facilitation of the learning of girls with disability or girls who become pregnant while at school? What role could the community play in bringing about an education of their young? And what about the age old, million-dollar question regarding governments' funding to girls' education as a way of demonstrating its commitment to gender parity.

What could we learn from the experience of Asia and the Pacific? Why, despite no dearth of 'good practices' and 'success stories', and especially of clear government policies favouring girls' education in the Region, does education of all girls continue to be elusive? What are the factors facilitating or hindering girls' access to and staying in school until they acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to function in their future roles as contributing citizens? What could be done to attract more or all girls to school and through various levels and eventual entry into areas of leadership and financial reward?

And what about the nature of schooling both in terms of school environment and curriculum and materials and especially teaching and learning? What have been done to ensure that school is safe and attractive for girls? A recent study sheds light on the fact that children drop out if they or their parents view educational content as unresponsive to their needs. How have people tackled curricula and materials laden with sex stereotypes which are detrimental to girls' self confidence, eventual life choices and opportunities? And what about school management? What types of role models are available for children of both sexes?

The President of the World Bank and the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund have predicted that among the Millennium Development goals that are likely to be missed are those on health and education. The question is: will the world community let this happen? How can we, as UNGEI partners, guarantee that this prediction does not come true?

Please do write and share your experience on these and any other issues you believe are affecting girls' education in your region. Remember to reveal some of the good practices and lessons learned that need highlighting and dissemination.

Since our discussion will directly feed in to the first regionally focused Global Advisory Committee (GAC) meeting, it would be great if you could speak to the issues that are relevant to Asia and the Pacific.

Please note that this e-discussion will only run until 30 May right before the start of the GAC meeting in Kathmandu. We will circulate the consolidated submissions prior to the meeting. To make sure that your inputs contribute directly to the GAC meeting, please have your say on this issue - NOW.

We look forward to a rich discussion that will be made possible by YOU.

Many thanks and talk to you soon.

Namtip Aksornkool

Senior Programme Specialist, Section for Inclusion and Quality Learning Enhancement,
UNESCO

Moderator for this eDiscussion