

Communiqué Towards Gender Equality in Education: Progress and challenges in Asia-Pacific Region

The time is ripe to establish a *Gender Equality Watch* to monitor the right of all girls and boys to a quality education.

Education experts representing 13 countries¹, United Nations agencies, international agencies, civil society and media met in Kathmandu, Nepal from 11-12 June to discuss issues related to equity, gender and quality in education in the Asia-Pacific region. It is the first time that the Committee convenes at the regional level, a move aimed to focus attention on countries' efforts around these issues.

The Asian region is making progress toward reducing gender disparity in education, particularly at the primary school level. There has also been a distinct decline in the total number of out-of-school children in almost all countries of the Asia-Pacific region. However, statistics show a rise in the number of girls who do not attend school, which remains a subject of growing concern. Behind statistics of greater gender parity lie large regional, national and local variations, particularly in South Asia.

What keeps girls out of school? Is safety and security in and around schools ensured? Do countries provide incentives to offset the costs of girls attending school? Are local communities motivated to send their girls to school? How is access and retention of girls in conflict- and disaster-affected countries being addressed? Are resources available? Is the community involved? Drawing on extensive country experiences, UNGEI partners responded to these and other questions with key conclusions and recommendations for policy and implementation.

Greater attention should be given to persistent shortages of trained female teachers and leaders in the education sector by:

- Developing and using reliable data on teachers;
- Expanding post-primary opportunities for girls;
- Providing comprehensive pre-service and local flexible in-service and other support for girls and women, as well as improving teacher deployment.

Participation and retention of girls in school and alternative learning must be improved by:

- Ensuring safety of girls in and around schools;
- Offering stipends, bursaries and/or conditional cash transfers or food supplements to girls and other disadvantaged or marginalized groups;
- Providing free and compulsory basic education, which also promotes retention and completion.

Quality in education, which has a stronger impact on girls than on boys, should be improved through:

- Significant reduction of the pupil-teacher ratio;
- More relevant and gender-responsive curricula and textbooks;
- Sustained focus on the teaching-learning process and learning outcomes in the classroom;
- A whole school approach that includes quality infrastructure, security, learning, water, sanitation and health;
- Efficient education management of teachers and resources.

Gender-responsive education should focus on ensuring a smooth school-to-work transition by:

- Providing education and training that improves women's chances of success in the workplace;
- Contributing to breaking patterns of gender segregation and premature entry in labour markets.

More empirical knowledge is needed on:

- The social and economic costs of denying half the population comparable employment opportunities;
- How to deal with factors preventing families from sending their girls to school, particularly poorer ones;
- How to realize the transformative power of learning in the classroom.

The UNGEI partnership calls on Ministries of Education, bilateral partners and civil society to respond to the education needs of women and girls. The forthcoming Education for All High-Level Group meeting offers a unique chance to address these issues through global commitment.

¹ Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Thailand and Viet Nam.