I. THE CONTEXT

The South Asia region has seen great progress in girls’ education. Two countries (Maldives and Sri Lanka), have already achieved MDG 2.¹ Four others (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal), are on track to reach MDG 2 by 2015. Only Pakistan and Afghanistan are off-track. In countries such as Bangladesh, the gender parity index (GPI) favours girls over boys (Global Monitoring Report (GMR), UNESCO ’09).

However, there are intra-country differences based on location of households and schools. There are also multiple and often overlapping disparities within disadvantaged communities such as nomad children in Afghanistan, tribal groups in India, children of estate workers in Sri Lanka, and mountain dwellers in Nepal.² About 35 million primary school age children remain out of school in South Asia, 53% among them girls (childinfo ’09).

While there is progress in enrollment, primary cohort completion rate for 2005 ranged from 42% in Nepal to 58% in Bangladesh (GMR ’09), and enrollment in secondary schools is low.³ There are numerous exit points for girls during the school cycle. Often, girls drop out at puberty because of reasons such as early marriage or pregnancy in Bhutan (MOE, 2008), dowry in India,⁴ and parental concerns about daughters’ security and protection of family honour (“izzat”)⁵ in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Other studies have found distance to schools, lack of female teachers or segregated schools and inadequate water and sanitation facilities as reasons for discontinuing schooling. There is also the phenomenon of “eve-teasing”, a subtle term to indicate teasing and harassment of adolescent girls, also a reason for dropping out of school.⁶

Effects of the economic crises are being felt in the region. For example, coping strategies being pursued by poor families in Pakistan and Nepal include withdrawal of children from school, or shifting children from private to public schools.⁷

Increasing conflict in Afghanistan and northern Pakistan seem to have a negative effect on girls’ education in particular. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, there were targeted attacks at girls' schools, girls and teachers, including killing and acid throwing.⁸

There are thus at least three challenges related to girls’ education in the region: (i) Limited access to schools in some countries such as northern Pakistan and Afghanistan; (ii) Disparities and inequities in countries even when there is access; and (iii) a subtle form of exclusion in countries that have reached MDG 2, where women are still directed toward gender-stereotyped occupations, or do not pursue a career despite high levels of tertiary education.⁹

II. THE REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

¹ MDG 2: “Achieve universal primary education: ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling”
² UNICEF country office annual reports 2008
³ This ranges from 23% girls in Afghanistan, 50% in Bangladesh and Maldives (GMR ’09). In India, drop out rate for 1 to 9 is 50.5 % boys and 51.3 % for girls, higher among tribal groups, and for girls within these groups (MOHRD, GOI 2007).
⁴ An educated girl will have to marry someone with more education, hence a bigger dowry. Therefore, educating girls beyond primary level is a disincentive for poor parents (Roshan Chitrakar, Barriers to girls Education, to be published, UNGEI)
⁵ In these cultures, honour of the family rests with the women and girls; Poverty and Economic Vulnerability in South Asia: Eshya Mujahid-Mukhtar, UNGEI 2008
⁶ Barriers to Girls’ Education; Roshan Chitrakar, to be published under UNGEI in 2009; USAID, 2002
⁸ In 2008, 275 schools were attacked or burned in Afghanistan, causing death and injury, including acid throwing on school girls and female teachers (annual report ’08). This led to closing down of 651 schools in the southern provinces. In Pakistan, there were attacks on 150 schools, mainly girls' schools (UNICEF statement, ’09). Three dozen girl students were poisoned in Parwan province 70 km north of Afghan capital Kabul on Sunday, a spokesman, Public Health Ministry (OPSCEN Brief, 27 April, 2009)
⁹ Barriers to Girls' Education; Roshan Chitrakar, to be published under UNGEI, 2009
During the reporting period, specific forms of support to countries included:

- Evidence for policy reform and advocacy through a deepened analysis of the barriers to girls’ education and suggestions for overcoming some of those barriers (to be published), with input from regional partner ILO
- Joint activity with regional partner ASPBAE on the Gender Equality Watch for Education Initiative
- Young Champions for Education Initiative: There are now over 400 young champions in six countries of South Asia, of whom about 40 had received TOT organized by UNGEI. A draft training module for the young champions is currently being field-tested in countries and will be finalized on the basis of field test results and feedback from countries. Also, a progress review of the initiative is underway, and will assess and provide recommendations for, among others, the potential for scaling up and mainstreaming
- With the EAP regional partnership, a joint statement during Global Action Week 2009, and with UNESCO and EAP on an Asia-Pacific photo contest on gender equality in education, as tools for advocacy and awareness.

III. Country Partnership – Case study of Nepal

The Nepal country partnership, known as the girls’ Education Network (GEN), received renewed high level commitment as a direct consequence of the June 2008 GAC meeting in Kathmandu. GEN is led by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and UNICEF. GEN supports the Gender and Equity section (GEDS) within MOE, to, among others, provide more opportunities for and raise the profile of girls’ education in the country, with a focus on inclusion of girls from disadvantaged groups and those with disabilities. The partnership has over 17 organisations representing NGOs, INGOs, journalist groups, young people, bilateral and multilateral agencies.

A. Selected Results and Activities:

- GEN is mainstreamed in the Nepal government’s annual plan as a major strategy to enhance girls’ access to schooling. Meetings are held each quarter, but heavy workload within the government and transfer of trained staff members constrain the network from playing a more pro-active role. A major contribution is the 2007 girls’ education strategy paper with inputs from network partners.
- Joint activities include:
  - WFP and UNICEF partnership to increase access and retention of girls in primary schools in 5 Central Region districts with the lowest rates for girls’ enrolment through the Girls’ incentive programme (GIP);

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10 The ongoing study and advocacy tool, to be presented at a separate session at the GAC meeting, plans to come up with a report card by country, based on indicators under 3 categories, including: (i) Education Context (Political Will, Education Infrastructure and Transparency and Accountability); (ii) Girls in the Classroom: (Quality Inputs in the Classroom; Education Incentives); and (iii) Equality and Opportunities (Gender Equality, Universal Basic Education). To be completed around October, 2009
11 The population of Nepal is about 27.6 million. NER for girls’ primary schooling is estimated at 82% with a GPI of .83; GPI for secondary schooling is .75(MOE, April 2009); primary cohort completion rate is 43% for girls; in 2006, 702,000 children (62% girls), were out of school; female literacy rate is 64% (GMR ‘09)
12 The WFP currently implements the Girls Incentive Programme (GIP) in 16 out of 75 districts in Nepal, of which five districts in the Terai (southern) region are implemented in collaboration with UNICEF. Under the GIP, a take-home ration of two liters of cooking oil is provided to the mothers of girls with attendance rates of at least 80 percent. This programme has been proven as one of the most effective tools for encouraging parents to send their daughters to school regularly and is attributed to the increase in girls’ attendance and enrollment rates. A survey results from 2005 shows a rise of girls to boys ratio (gender parity) from 0.72 to 1.15 in the GIP supported schools (without UNICEF collaboration). And the attendance increased by 27% during the 2001 to 2005. In December 2008, WFP and UNICEF teamed
ii. With MOE/DOE/GEDS, UNICEF and UNESCO, on capacity building of government GFP (Gender Focal Point) on gender sensitive planning, monitoring and reporting in 4 Regions benefiting 87 district level partners including 73 GFPs, (female members of teacher union, women development officers, etc)

iii. UNESCO and UNFPA on translating and disseminating the GENIA toolkit

- **UNICEF:**
  
  - Important publications during the reporting period: (i) A Gender Checklist for all the stakeholder from Policy Level to community level; and (ii) Gender Manual for teacher Training, both in Nepali
  
  - Mobilization of women Parliamentarians (members of the constituent assembly or CA) for girls’ education. In September, a signature campaign by 197 CA members has been launched under the leadership of the Finance Minister, Dr. Babu Ram Bhattarai and announce 15 commitments, which was endorsed later by the Prime Minister, Mr. Prachanda Dahal
  
  - Young Champions: Over 300 young champions work as advocates and spokespersons at community levels in 4 (out of 20) of the lowest performing districts in girls’ education

- **UNFPA:** Deputy Representative joined the field visit by UNGEI Global Advisory Committee to Kapilvastu and visited schools to discuss the issue of girls together to decrease the gender gap in primary schools in Nepal. Together they extended the coverage of the GIP to selected schools in the top five low-performing districts in terms of gender disparity. Based on indicators and information provided by the Department of Education – Flash Report 2008/2009 current net enrollment rates for girls in these districts range from 71-77 percent; lagging behind the national enrollment rate for girls of 92 percent. The joint WFP and UNICEF collaboration programme provides oil rations to 10,000 girls in the Terai region with an aim to bring and retain girls at schools from the disadvantaged and marginalized communities. Due to the recent implementation of this programme, results are not yet available. However, successes are evident through the improvement in educational indicators from other districts covered under the GIP. The UNICEF implementation modality is to support the DEO and partner NGOs to create child-friendly schools by supporting teacher training, child centred teaching methods, strengthening school management, provision of educational materials, improving the classroom environment with wall paintings and provision of furniture as required.

13 To achieve the EFA goal No 5, and reduce the existing gender gap, Ministry of Education has appointed Gender Focal Points in all 75 District Education Offices, 5 Regional Education Directorate including 13 GFPs in all its central level offices (Total 93). To implement gender responsive educational management, act, curriculum and curricular materials capacity building of GFPs was necessary. In this connection, in previous years, UNESCO Kathmandu supported Department of Education to organize training to Feeder Hostel Wardens and GFPs of the concerned districts. This year also to build the capacity of all district and central level all GFPs of MOE, Teachers Union and Women Development Officers UNESCO, UNICEF and Department of Education jointly organized trainings on gender sensitive planning, monitoring and reporting in Nepalgunj, Biratnagar and Kaski.

14 GENIA is a network of gender focal points in Ministries of Education across Asia (13 countries currently) designed to share information and lessons on gender and education. Revised version of the GENIA toolkit was translated and adopted into Nepali language. It was printed and disseminated to the CLCs and Resource Centres in the selected districts jointly with UNFPA. The GENIA Toolkit was designed to be a cluster of resources for use by Education planners and implementers to promote gender equality and mainstream gender in the education system. In 2008, UNFPA in collaboration with UNESCO distributed IEC materials, including the Genia toolkit, and books to 28 Resource Centres and 28 Community Learning Centres in 6 UNFPA focussed districts and 2 UNESCO districts. The utilization of the learning centres is monitored by the district offices. It is expected that more girls will visit the centres and help promote girl’s education
education with community leaders and met with girls on their aspirations and interests. As a follow up to the visit stationery and education materials were sent to the schools that the mission visited; Through the regular Population and Reproductive Health, Community Development Programme, in 2007 and 2008, UNFPA provided scholarships to 5,318 dalit and disadvantaged girls for their promotion and retention in school. Further life skills and empowerment training were provided to 4,297 dalit girls in 2008 using the training package Choose Your Future: Life Time Options for Adolescent Girls

- UNESCO: Gender Responsive budgeting (see below)

Plans for 2009 include:

- Women Parliamentarians: As a follow up UNICEF is working jointly with GEDS and Educational Pages, one of the media partners, to orient the CA members on the educational policies and issues and to visit the schools for connecting with the community for their support to children’s education and raise these issues and act on them in the parliament (this has already begun)
- With DEOs at the district to establish and support a district level GEN to strengthen the GFP’s effort to work for girls’ education. This will be connected/federated upward with the central level GEN;
- Expand the number of young champions to more low performing districts.
- Strengthen capacity of central and district level Gender Focal Points of Ministry of Education;
- Undertake Situation Analysis of Gender Responsive Budgeting in Education Sector (MOE, UNICEF and UNESCO); and
- Strengthen GENIA and disseminate the GENIA toolkit as part of UNGEI (UNESCO, other partners)

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15 Ministry of Education (MOE) has already adopted Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) for the education sector. But indicators are unclear, and there is limited understanding in GRB and its use within MOE. This joint project of UNESCO, UNICEF and MOE aims to understand the situation of GRB of MOE in Education Sector and identify areas for improvements. MOE will lead the project with support from UNESCO and UNICEF, particularly with regard to the formation of the advisory board, undertaking a situation analysis of GRB in the education sector, organizing consultation meetings/workshops and further follow up of recommendations of the situation analysis report.