

# EQUALS

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## Boys in Schools: Masculinities, Education and Gender Equality

Helen Longlands



A group of school boys at play in India.

In 2008, UNESCO estimates that 72 million children worldwide are still out of school. Of these, 57% are girls. Globally, boys still enjoy a privileged position in terms of access to education, and for every 100 literate men there are still only 84 literate women. On average, once they have left school, boys and the men they become benefit from a broader range of job opportunities, higher salaries and greater political participation than women. This access to power also awards them advantages in more informal contexts such as the family. However, there are a great many discrepancies. Gender interacts with racial, social class and religious issues to affect boys' relationships to schooling, and so within and across different countries the issues regarding boys and education are varied, complex and often inconsistent.

Many boys are still failing to gain access to quality education for reasons including poverty, displacement, migration, conflict, health, HIV and AIDS, disability, drug use, lack of physical and material resources, poor teaching or social and cultural attitudes. This limits the opportunities they have to enable them to develop the skills and knowledge they require in order to realise their potential in life. It can also exacerbate these problems further; lack of education can lead to unemployment, poor health and other social problems. For example, research from parts of sub-Saharan Africa emphasises the problem of outdated education systems which do not provide young men with the skills they need to enter the job market. In addition, many schools are sites where traditional and rigid gender stereotypes are reinforced. Research undertaken in the Caribbean highlights a critical problem of poor educational opportunities combined with social and cultural perceptions of masculinities which leads some boys to engage in violent

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behaviour and serious crime. Elsewhere, including Brazil, Cambodia and Uganda, street, mobile and marginalised children and youth often lack any kind of formal education; this increases their vulnerability to HIV and AIDS and drug misuse. In many wealthy countries, boys from low income families are among those children most likely to be failed by the education systems. Although they may have similar aspirations as other children, problems such as the feeling that achievement in education is too difficult or simply not worth it because the rewards are too few can lead many boys to become de-motivated by their school experiences. This can lead to higher than average exclusion rates particularly from secondary schools, and leaving school early with a lack of qualifications.

Many initiatives regarding gender and education have tended to focus on girls. This is understandable given the extent of the problems that girls face. However, it is becoming increasingly recognised by organisations, policy makers and researchers working in the field of education that men and boys have a significant role to play in addressing inequalities.

As such, various programmes have been successfully established in recent years which actively engage boys and young men in challenging existing practices & stereotypical understandings of masculinity. Dominant, aggressive or violent forms of masculinity have been especially targeted because of the effect that these associated behaviours have on individuals and societies as a whole. Not only for victims and perpetrators but also for non-perpetrators who are stigmatised by them purely because they are male.

Successful programme approaches, such as the Stepping Stones participatory training programme which has been successfully implemented throughout many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, use education to challenge individual and collective perceptions of manhood through explicit discussions of masculinity and the role of men and boys in the issues the programmes are designed to address. These programmes are designed to be long term and provide sustainable changes in attitudes and practices. They emphasise the necessity for men and boys to be actively involved in addressing gender inequalities. They also advocate a collective approach. The Targeted AIDS Intervention programme in South Africa uses an education-based peer mentoring approach and football to engage young men between the ages of 11 and 18 in discussions about gender equality and women's rights, sexuality, HIV and AIDS and care-giving. It provides the opportunity for boys to critically reflect on issues regarding masculinities. It also encourages teachers and school leaders to participate in training workshops.

Peer mentoring, as an approach to increase boys' positive participation in education, has also been used successfully in schools in other parts of the world including the UK and the Caribbean. In these instances, peer mentors are encouraged to be collaborative and supportive but also assertive and demanding, in order to provide a means/

excuse for pupils to engage in schooling without jeopardising their own image through conforming to teacher pressure. The use of peer promoters is another method which has been successfully implemented in schools and universities such as the University of Western Cape in South Africa and schools in Nigeria to encourage young

men to rethink their masculine identities, and promote non-violent, gender equitable attitudes and relationships. The 'peer promoter' approach offers boys and young men the opportunity to discuss issues

in a 'safe space' without fear of being reproached, ridiculed or rejected by their friends. It also offers boys positive male role models from within their own peer groups.

Many NGOs provide educational projects designed to reach marginalised groups of boys who often fail to access any sort of formal education. Through the 'Another Way to Learn' initiative, UNESCO is working with partner organisations in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia to implement projects based on a holistic approach to community-based education and training. Many of these projects use drama to work with disadvantaged groups of young people including street and drug using children. For example, UNESCO has collaborated with The Ishara Puppet Theatre Trust – a leading puppet theatre in India – and the Salaam Baalak Trust – a New Delhi-based NGO – to work with young street dwellers. This project uses theatre workshops, including puppetry, collaborative script writing and performance, to teach basic literacy and other educational skills, and tackle issues that these children and many others like them face on a daily basis. The children then perform their plays in their own communities. A similar project called the Centre of Hope in Trinidad and Tobago uses participatory drama, music and role play to raise awareness, transmit information and build creative life-skills among the youth. This project targets young people from socially excluded and economically deprived communities who are particularly vulnerable to crime and drug use. Many of these are boys and young men who have dropped out of school early.

Despite the successful work already occurring, there are many challenges restricting or preventing positive change – particularly the challenge of reaching those who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

**Men and boys have a significant role to play in addressing inequalities: various programmes have been successfully established in recent years which actively engage boys and young men in challenging existing practices and stereotypical understandings of masculinity.**



Boys reading at a school in Cambodia: the provision of good quality resources in schools can encourage learning



**Newly enrolled boys and girls walk into their classroom in Kenya. Gender equality initiatives in education should work towards ensuring that all boys and girls are able to access good quality schooling.**

Many boys who are disengaged with schooling do not want to be part of any kind of formal education programme. In some countries, including South Africa, Jamaica and the USA, programmes targeting adolescent boys involved in gang culture are faced with the problem that schooling or other forms of education do not necessarily offer the rewards that boys can reap from their involvement in crime (such as status, a sense of belonging or access to material wealth). Lack of adequate training of teachers to cope with the diverse needs of children, and negative teacher attitudes regarding gender, are serious issues which also need to be addressed. Boys will not engage with education or be encouraged back into schools where they experience harsh discipline – including high levels of corporal punishment – or where teachers and sometimes parents expect them to fail. Nor will they be encouraged to change their own understandings of and attitudes towards gender in school environments where teachers are covertly or overtly discriminatory and violent towards marginalised groups of children including girls and other boys.

At national and international levels, there is increasing recognition of the pressing need to address gender disparities and inequalities in education. Governments and partner organisations from around the world have pledged their commitment to the Millennium Goals and 'Education for All', but although progress is being made, the goals of parity and equality in education have not yet been met. In 2003, the UN held an Expert Group Meeting on the Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality. At this meeting the importance of actively engaging men and boys in gender equality initiatives was emphasised. However, it was also recognised

that resistance to change is a serious issue. The report from this meeting states that "boys in school in much of the world are aware that rules related to gender are changing, and that space must be made for girls. However, many school-going boys and male teachers resist change." Nationally, governments and public education systems have a crucial role to play in instilling a commitment to gender equality and challenging and changing oppressive gender norms. Governments must work with the societies they govern to develop a collaborative approach to addressing gender inequalities. Governments must join in partnership with organisations working with boys and girls, men and women, and establish relationships with other social institutions working towards change.

Successful programme approaches in education must work towards changing, on a long term and sustainable basis, existing social norms regarding masculinity that can adversely affect not only the wellbeing of girls and women but also boys and men. In order to realise gender equality, organisations working with boys and men must not divert resources away from organisations that work with girls and women. They must be careful not to work at odds with these organisations but rather develop collaborative, supportive and unifying approaches. In this way, boys, men, girls and women may be empowered to challenge gender stereotypes and be actively and positively involved in the realisation of gender equality in and through education.

*Helen Longlands is currently researching masculinities and education as a doctoral student at the Institute of Education, University of London. She previously worked as a teacher in London*

## Letter from the Editors

The Education for All (EFA) gender agenda is often seen as focusing exclusively on girls. Meanwhile little attention is given to the difficulties some boys also face in accessing school and progressing well. In addition, concerns with gender equality associated with providing all children with the same education can obscure the ways in which teachers, pupils and school managers often assume all boys are the same, and expect particular forms of behaviour linked with being 'a real boy'. This might contribute to boys leaving school to earn money, tolerating harsh punishments or associating themselves with aggressive behaviour.

This issue of Equals, supported by the Commonwealth Education Fund, looks at the challenges the EFA agenda faces with regard to masculinities, men, boys and education. It aims to set concern with boys' experiences of exclusion from school or lack of progression within a wider context of discussing gender equality in education. Articles explore some of the pressures on boys to perform in particular ways, and how this affects their individual experiences of school. They also highlight the ways in which, by embracing softer, more caring forms of masculinity, men and boys can support gender equitable education for girls and boys. Book reviews explore particular challenges for boys' education and equality in the context of conflict, where dominant forms of masculinity are often associated with war and violence.

Achieving gender equality requires paying attention to boys and men as well as girls and women. This issue highlights some of the many different initiatives taking place around the world to engage men and boys in education and the promotion of gender equality. We would be very interested to hear about similar activities that you are involved in.

**Helen Longlands, Amy North and Elaine Unterhalter**

# Good at football or good at care? Boys struggle for status at school

Jon Swain

The journey from boy to man is unpredictable and frequently hazardous. How we understand men and gender and the development of boys has repercussions for work in education, health, policing and social services. I have researched young boys' identities, boys' own cultures and their interpersonal interactions in schools in the UK over the last ten years.

## Peer group popularity and status

One of the most important features of school life for boys is their peer group. This gives meanings to everyday experiences.

Through friends, boys tend to work out what it means to be a boy. Each peer group has its own cultural identity, or way of life, with its own shared rules, values and interests.

Boys need to work out within their own circle what is acceptable to say, how to say it, and what to do, or how to act. Being a

boy has to be carefully negotiated, and performed, almost on a daily basis. One of the most important parts of school life for a boy (and girl) is the need to gain popularity, and this is connected to status. For boys this is linked to the search to achieve an acceptable form of masculinity. Boys' notion of status comes from having a certain position within the peer group hierarchy. This is determined by the number of resources they are able to accumulate.

Some of these resources are intellectual, like doing well academically; some are economic (money); some are social and involve language (interpersonal); some are cultural, like keeping in touch with the latest fashions, music, TV programmes, computer expertise or mobile phones.

Boys' masculine identities are linked to, and defined by, what they do with and to their

**An integral component in the construction of dominant masculinities is for boys to show they are different from girls. Boys gradually learn at school that they risk being teased or bullied if they associate too closely with girls.**

bodies. For many boys the most cherished resource will generally be physicality or athleticism in the form of strength, toughness, power, skill, fitness and speed.

In research I did in London schools, I was interested in who was regarded as the 'ideal boy' and what kinds of resources these 'ideal boys' used to gain status. Sporting success (particularly in football) was a sign of successful masculinity, and high performance in sport and games (both on the field and in the playground) was the single most effective way of gaining popularity and status in the male peer group. One 11 year old boy explained how sporting ability gave the 'leading' boys the power to choose friends: "if you're not good at football you're not friends with anybody who's good at football. All the people who are good at football are the best people, like the most popular."

Looking in-depth at the research in London schools is only one part of a global picture of boys' status. Other research concludes that there is no one overarching pattern of masculinity. We therefore need to think in terms of 'masculinities' rather than 'masculinity'. Masculinities are diverse, not only between but also within different settings. So for example, status and peer group pressures might take different forms in richer or poorer schools. Some forms of masculinity are dominant and others are marginalised or subordinated. Although dominant types of masculinity may appear to be exemplified in tough sporting heroes and action men, there are many other modes of masculinity. There are many forms of 'softer' or 'caring' masculinities that do not have the same profile.

## Dominant masculinities

An integral component in the construction of dominant masculinities is for boys to show they are different from girls. Although the experiences of gender can be complicated, and can change between settings, masculinity is always constructed in relation to a dominant image of gender difference and ultimately defines itself as what femininity is not. Boys gradually learn at school that they risk being teased or bullied if they associate too closely with girls. This is part of their need to prove that they have the right masculine credentials as heterosexual boys. This is illustrated by the comments from boys in a London school who state that "it's fun, basically, to hate the girls and have wars with them. It's not cool to be seen with a girl, you would definitely get teased."

*Jon Swain is a Research Officer at the Institute of Education, University of London*



Credit: Glenn Edwards/Oxfam

Boys playing football in Tanzania: sporting success can help boys gain friends and status at school.

# Starting with the Self: Education for empowerment in India

Jyotsna Jha

Boys underachievement is increasingly an issue in many developed and a few developing countries. Research conducted by the Commonwealth Secretariat shows that boys face as many gender stereotypical pressures and expectations as girls. They are expected to be the provider and protector, and to conform to the norms of masculinity which can be stifling. Real change in gender relations cannot come without influencing their thinking processes. They have to play an important role in women's empowerment in societies. Education for empowerment would entail an education that provides knowledge and skills, and socialisation of the kind which prepare and promote people to make strategic life-choices that were previously denied to them.

First developed in rural India for accelerated learning for girls

of a residential programme known as Udaan (the flight), the Social Learning Package (SLP) is one such approach to education. Care India, who pioneered the approach, felt that girls coming from deprived backgrounds needed structured curriculum not only in language, mathematics and science but something extra. They needed guidance to develop 'into self-confident individuals who could think critically, visualise their own potential and be conscious of their social responsibilities.' Social learning in the family or community is often an uncritical, unquestioning acceptance of narrow world-views. SLP was conceived to provide a counter to this form of social education. It had the delicate task of encouraging a critical and democratic outlook in children whilst at the same time not alienating them from their own cultural environment. The early experiences and impact of the programme were very encouraging. The potential of the approach for boys as well as girls was evident.

SLP provides a means for working with boys and girls on gender issues. It centres on the concept and framework of 'relationships'. The self of the learner, either a boy or girl, is placed at the centre of several concentric circles which look at:

- Self
- Immediate family, friends, community, local environment

- Larger society/gender divides/hierarchy
- Institutions
- Ecology & Economy

Topics covered in class look at cleanliness and interdependence in nature, marriage, health, inequality, and banking. Instead of an overload of information, the emphasis is on exploration of self and society through dialogue, role-play, games, stories and projects. Skills of verbal expression, information gathering, independent thinking, as well as vital information, are imparted. Success depends on dialogue between the teacher and the student, as well as between student and student, in conversations,

discussions, and question and answer sessions. These conversations provide an opportunity for the teachers to examine their own

beliefs and experiences and to let children develop and express their own views.

CARE India collaborated with the government of Uttar Pradesh under the Janashala programme. This was a United Nations supported national programme for innovations in primary education in India. The package was introduced to nearly 200 co-educational State-run primary schools. An evaluation of the programme by the faculty of education from the Central Institute of Education, University of Delhi, India

came with the following observations:

- a positive change was witnessed in the nature of the teacher-student relationships and the ethos of the school from an authoritarian to a more democratic, open, friendly and dialogue oriented approach;
- a shift in teachers' attitudes enabled them to see the potential within their learners and their capacity for growth;
- teachers felt that the activities within the SLP gave children adequate scope to link the taught subject matter with their real world experiences;
- for parents, the changes in their child/ children's personality, behaviour and attitudes, which were already visible, were matters of great pride, and they also developed a broader understanding of education including aspects of social learning and personality development;
- children were beginning to show a spirit of freedom and curiosity about their environment and existing belief systems. They were more confident and had increased self-esteem.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has collaborated with CARE India to develop the package for post-primary grades six, seven and eight. The success and potential of the package lies in its wide appeal and potential for application in diverse contexts. The government of Cyprus is adapting it and translating it into Greek. Thinking about gender equality is an important process for girls and boys in schools. SLP is one very practical way teachers can begin to do this.

*Jyotsna Jha is the Gender and Education Adviser at the Commonwealth Secretariat. More information on the SLP and the Commonwealth Secretariat's work on gender, boys and education is available at <http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Internal/33893/37058/173230/background/>*



Boys and girls engage in small group learning in India. Initiatives such as SLP help to develop a more democratic and cooperative approach to learning.

# Talking With Teachers

## Supporting Our Sisters: Helping girls in Ghana get a second chance

Issac Peprah



In Ghana there are severe gender and regional disparities in primary school enrolment, particularly in rural and deprived urban communities.

Girls, especially in poor and rural communities, are discriminated against when it comes to sending children to school. My own family's experience, and particularly that of my sister, has made me

believe that men can play a crucial role in supporting the education of female family members and actively defend their right to go to school.

My family is from the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana. My nuclear family included my mother, my father, their four sons and one daughter. Fortunately, all the sons were able to complete secondary education and each started a profession in carpentry, masonry and plumbing, except I who managed to struggle through secondary education and up through university.

However, unfortunately for my only sister, she became pregnant during her final year at senior secondary level and had to stay on for one year to nurse her baby after delivery.

After one and a half years, because she was a bright student, she decided to re-enter and continue her education. However, due to financial constraints and community attitudes towards 'young mothers', after the death of my father, my mother told her not to bother herself with schooling.

It took almost two years of intensive negotiations, dialogue and discussions by

the family head, local church leaders and the Girl's Club management committee, with the active support of my brothers and I, to convince my mother to allow my sister to re-enter school.

Happily, my sister completed her secondary and nursing training in 2006 and is currently working at a district hospital as a nurse. At the same time, she is pursuing a part-time degree course in mental health.

Personally, I believe that there are many girls in Ghana who, like my sister, have lost their 'first educational chance' through similar situations and a range of other barriers that prevent girls from completing their education.

It is essential that men actively support their sisters and other girls and women to break traditional barriers and negative social attitudes in order to enable them to develop their full potential.

*Issac Peprah qualified as a teacher in Ghana. He is currently completing an MA in Gender, Education and International Development at the Institute of Education, University of London*

## Teaching boys to be different in Jamaica

Jason Lawrence-White

In Jamaica boys underachieve at school. Boys do very poorly in their final year exams in secondary school. In primary school boys are more likely than girls not to reach the required level in English, maths and science. In colleges and universities, girls outnumber boys by about 4 to 1. Boys are more likely to drop out of school than girls. There is growing concern about gang culture and boys at school.

Boys have to be 'boys'; they have to act, talk, walk and do boyish things. If they don't they are regarded as being 'sissies'. In some homes boys do not do anything that is regarded as house work - they do not make their beds, cook, clean or wash their clothes

because that is what girls are supposed to do. They can stay out as long and as late as they want to because they are boys and can protect themselves. They are not supposed to cry or show signs of weakness because this is a 'woman thing'. In schools they are expected to do subjects that are traditionally male-oriented. They are expected to be rough and play rough.

Teaching in Jamaica I have seen boys considered to be 'sissies' bullied and excluded from friendship groups. These boys are mostly friendly with girls - other boys will not associate with them. When situations like these arise, I have to explain to my students that excluding someone from

friendship groups on the assumption that they are 'sissy' is not good. I have to explain to them that because a boy does not do the things that they think all boys should do it does not make him different.

In our Family Life Education class, I explain that helping with chores in the home does not make one a 'sissy' either. I explain that being different is a good thing as that is what makes us unique.

*Jason Lawrence-White teaches in Jamaica. He is currently completing an MA in Education, Gender and International Development at the Institute of Education, University of London*

# A Hopeful Future: Men learning from women leaders in Liberia

**Abraham Conneh**

People of every rank and file in all nations are looking for models to emulate and for heroes to follow. Empowering women to take leadership roles is important to promote positive role models for women and girls, and to challenge stereotypes about the way men and women are expected to behave. Good leaders are able to champion the cause of education for girls and boys. The experience of my country, Liberia, has shown that in order to bring about change, it is important that men actively support and learn from women in positions of leadership.

## A challenging context

Between its foundation in 1847 and 2006, Liberia had 21 presidents, all of whom were men. The Americo-Liberians or free slaves, who were returned to Liberia by the American Colonization Society, dominated the society.

However, in 1989, poor leadership, bad governance, rampant corruption, the marginalization of indigenous communities, tribalism pulled by the train of illiteracy plunged my country into a ruthless civil war. The war lasted 14 years and resulted in the disruption

of productive economic activities and the loss of livelihood for whole communities. There was widespread destruction, loss of public and private property, and serious damage to physical and social infrastructures. Almost half of Liberia's pre-war population of about 2.5 million was displaced either internally or externally and about 180,000 people were killed.

The conflict seriously weakened the country's economic and social policy-making organs and government institutions. The educational sector was seriously damaged. The war increased illiteracy through the closure of schools and training institutions. There was a complete disruption of the programmes and infrastructure of the education system. We are now left with an illiteracy rate of 70%,

unemployment of 80% and an HIV and AIDS prevalence rate of 5.6%.

**My country is recovering from an ugly past and is faced with a challenging present. However, thanks to positive leadership and a commitment by both men and women to support education for girls and boys, I believe that it has a hopeful future.**

## Seeds of hope

In spite of this situation, men and

women in my country have demonstrated tremendous demand for education and commitment to exemplar leadership by electing into office, in 2006, the first female president of an African nation, Ellen Johnson

Sirleaf. She has led urgent programmes for post war education reconstruction in Liberia with support from partners and NGOs. The rebuilt education sector is expected to contribute towards peace, conflict resolution, poverty reduction and meeting the needs of special groups such as demobilised and unemployed youths. In a country that has seen so much conflict, where certain dominant forms of masculinity have been associated with war and violence, many boys have to rethink and re-learn what it means to be male in order to help successfully re-build a peaceful society.

Available statistics have consistently shown low school enrolment, especially for girls at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. However, over the past few years we have seen tremendous improvement in the education sector which shows that the enrolment gap between boys and girls is gradually beginning to close. Despite this, adult illiteracy in Liberia remains high with only 26% women being literate compared with 50% men. We are therefore still far from achieving gender equality at all levels. However, we remain hopeful.

## Oxfam's work

Since 1995, Oxfam has been working in Liberia with partners to support efforts in the country to reduce poverty and suffering with a focus on public health, livelihoods and education. Through our education work we are reaching 8,424 students (4,716 males, 3708 females) and 203 teachers (153 males, 50 females) in 12 schools within 3 counties (Monserado, Margibi and Bong). We have seen a tremendous improvement among the students who have enrolled in the Accelerated Learning Program. We also work with Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) in project schools. There is now increased awareness of the role of parents in advocating for support for their schools with the county education authorities. In addition, Oxfam is supporting the training of primary school teachers at the Monrovia Consolidated School System.

We see all of these interventions as critical to leadership and employment opportunities for both men and women in Liberia. Education is the key to the social-economic growth for any people or nation, because an enlightened mind can never be enslaved. My country is recovering from an ugly past and is faced with a challenging present. However, thanks to positive leadership and a commitment by both men and women to support education for girls and boys, I believe that it has a hopeful future.



The education experience of many boys and girls in Liberia is improving. Oxfam has helped provide new school benches and uniforms made by local craftspeople.

*Abraham Conneh is the Education Programme Officer for Oxfam GB Liberia*

# Viewpoint

## Kaduna, Nigeria: An uphill battle for change in masculinities which prevent education

Colette Harris

Much of the resistance to using a gender lens for social analysis occurs because this is seen to designate women and exclude men. This frequently occurs in development projects. Starting from the opposite end and viewing the world through the lens of masculinities produces a very different picture. Studies in the west have shown how working-class boys resist middle-class education. They see it as negating important elements of their manhood. But there has been little exploration of the relationship of masculinities to education in the global south.

Since 2007, I have been implementing a non-formal education project in Kaduna, Nigeria, aimed at supporting youth to

analyse issues around the endemic tensions between (Hausa) Muslims and local Christian groups. Central to the project has been young people's own analysis of local masculinities. In small group discussions we look at what it means to be a man. These are then written on flip-chart paper to serve as the basis for future analysis. This has exposed, among other things, ways in which these encourage engagement in violence and increase poverty.

The educational levels of Hausa Muslims, both men and women, can be directly linked to masculinities. A Muslim man is expected to be educated Quranically but secular education is suspect since it has

long been viewed as related to Christianity and western imperialism. Some parents still fail to send even their sons to school. Consequently, many Muslims have poor skill levels and infrequently attend universities. This situation is resented because it decreases their employment potential; however at the same time it is accepted because it is seen as part of local culture.

An important element in being a real man is control over family members, expressed in part through neither educating teenage daughters, nor allowing wives to enter employment, on pain of ridicule. Mockery and ostracism are significant ways in which communities discipline men.

While today's economic pressures are seriously affecting the material situation in Kaduna and encouraging men to take secular education more seriously, as long as current definitions of masculinities remain valid it will be an uphill battle to produce significant change.

*Colette Harris is a Senior Lecturer in Conflict, Governance and Development at the School of Development Studies, University of East Anglia*

## Conference Comments

### Politicising Masculinities: Beyond the Personal

Emily Esplen



What does it take to politicise existing work with men on gender? How can we get beyond stereotypes of women and men in order to truly transform oppressive gender orders? How can we re-frame our engagement with questions of masculinities and power so that new alliances can be created - bringing work on masculinities into the heart of movements for social and gender justice?

These were just some of the pressing

questions grappled with at an exciting symposium on 'Politicising Masculinities', held in October 2007 in Dakar, Senegal, organised by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex.

At this conference, which attracted leading figures from academia and NGOs working in the field of masculinities, exciting new thinking and possibilities emerged through conversations. Four key areas of discussion arose: new ways of theorising; male bodies

and sexualities; shaping policies and transforming institutions such as education; and mobilisation, activism and movement-building.

Participants spoke of the need to find other ways of thinking about gender in order to better make sense of the complexity of boys', girls', men's and women's relationships and experiences.

Participants highlighted the need to create spaces for men and women to talk about the uncertainties they experience in relation to their bodies and sexualities, while others discussed the practical strategies needed to promote men's greater mobilisation around structural inequities - such as capacity-building for men as activists.

It was a unique gathering which offered an important opportunity: to inform and inspire a greater engagement by men in the struggle for gender justice and broader social change.

*A full report on the Masculinities Symposium is available at [http://www.siyanda.org/docs/esplen\\_greig\\_masculinities.pdf](http://www.siyanda.org/docs/esplen_greig_masculinities.pdf)*

# Recent Events

## Caribbean discussion on Boys and Education UNICEF and CARICOM

William Neal

“What is happening to boys in our education systems and what can we do about it?” were two of the guiding questions examined at a two day sub-regional meeting in Belize on 21-22 November, 2007. Keeping boys in education and learning is a concern for a number of countries across the Caribbean. Academics, practitioners, policy makers, school managers and teachers, and representatives from the Teachers’ Union came from across the region to participate in the conference. Children and adolescents from a number of different Caribbean countries were interviewed, and compelling videos of their opinions and their demands that they be a part of the solution were shared with the participants.

It is hoped that by highlighting the issue of boys’ dropout and underachievement within the Caribbean education system, the region will look more urgently at key dimensions of equity and quality within

education. And will it be forced to recognise the ways that masculine identities link with education trends and practices, such as high levels of exclusion. These interact with other factors including poor employment opportunities, family relationships, health and pervasive violence. It is now an opportune moment to examine how schools can better foster a culture of respect for each other, improve relations and encourage the sharing of responsibilities between men and women, and ultimately produce long lasting changes in gender relations.

*“The drop out rate of boys from our education system, their lower achievement in schools, is a gender dimension which has not received the attention it deserves. Gender is often defined as ‘girls’ or ‘women’ and it should encompass both males and females. It is time we assessed education with a gender-neutral lens – identifying the causes of the challenges and what needs to*

*be done for both girls and boys to ensure their right to quality education; that they remain as long as possible in school and achieve to their fullest potential”* said Rana Flowers, UNICEF Belize Representative.

An array of factors that both inspire boys to remain in schools or propel them to leave were identified during the meeting. A major part of the challenge was recognised as securing the commitment to plan for and implement ongoing educational reform. All those involved in education including parents and children need to work together to realise the potential of schooling: that education is so much more than just ‘going to school’ and showing up for classes; that education can and should be empowering.

Recommendations on the realisation that boys need to be socialised more positively from birth, encouraged to go to school and enjoy suitable and effective educational opportunities once in school. Schools must offer a curriculum that can be adjusted to support boys’ needs, and the region must help boys to deal with the pressures they feel to conform to social pressures or pursue the short term of economic independence. The advice forms part of a twenty-point Declaration: Building Region Fit for Children.

# New Reports

## A Study to Examine School-Related Gender-Based Violence in Malawi

USAID, January 2008

This report summarises the results of the participatory learning & action research conducted in the Machinga District in Southern Malawi through the USAID-funded Safe Schools Program. The objective of this program is to bring together all stakeholders, including children, to reduce school-related gender-based violence and create safe school environments for both girls and boys. The study, conducted in October and November 2005, shows that both

girls and boys can be victims and perpetrators of gender-based violence. And corporal punishment is widely used in schools.

The main perpetrators of violence in schools are teachers and boys. Some community members also abused children on the way to school. Although some systems of reporting gender-based violence in schools exist, the concept is not clearly understood. The effectiveness of the reporting structures

is questioned in the report. The report concludes that properly addressing school-related gender-based violence requires interventions that tackle the ‘push factors’, such as the abusive nature of schools and the exploitative, gendered attitudes of teachers and the ‘pull factors’ of home life such as parental pressure on children to miss school in order to help in the home.

Available at <http://devtechsys.com/services>

## Making Schools Inclusive: How change can happen

Save the Children UK, 2008

The most disadvantaged children are those most likely to remain out of school. This report summarises Save the Children UK’s experience in making schools more inclusive for children. It explores in detail the barriers to achieving inclusive education.

And it poses questions about possible ways of delivering good quality, inclusive education for children from minority ethnic communities, disabled children, girls facing

discrimination or children in conflict-affected areas. The book draws on practical learning from challenges in a variety of situations and presents programme examples from various low and middle income countries.

These include Vietnam, Bangladesh, China, Somalia, Western Balkans, Mongolia, Nepal, Tajikistan, India, Morocco, Serbia, Kyrgyzstan, Peru and Brazil. These studies

showcase programmes that target specific groups of vulnerable children, build inclusive school communities, promote change throughout an education system and address financial barriers to inclusive education. Concrete examples and practical responses to real-life challenges are offered in this report.

Available at [http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54\\_5432.htm](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54_5432.htm)

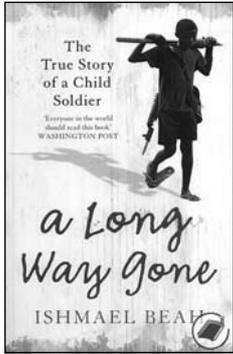
# Book Reviews

## A Long Way Gone: The True Story of a Child Soldier

Ishmael Beah,

Harper Perennial, 2008, ISBN13: 9780007247097

Review by Elizabeth Baroudi



As someone who has worked for more than 8 years in Sudan with child victims of war and conflict, I found this story to be typical of what is happening to many children. A Long Way Gone is the true life story

of Ishmael Beah, a former child soldier from Sierra Leone who now lives in New York. This is an excellent account of the experiences of child soldiers and transports the reader to the war zone of Sierra Leone. I recommend that

anyone who wants to know what happens to child soldiers reads this book.

When Ishmael was twelve he lived in a small village in Africa. He had only heard of a distant war when it reached his village. He was separated from his family and fled from the war. Before he saw his parents again the rebel army killed them and everyone else in the village. He then joined the army because he was tired of running and wanted revenge for his parents' deaths.

After two years of brutal fighting and drug use he found his way to a rehabilitation centre. Eight months later he moved in with his uncle in the capital. He went on a trip to the UN in

New York to talk about children fighting in wars. Even though Ishmael had killed men in war, he changed his life by moving to America and graduating from college.

Ishmael's ability to learn from his mistakes and the opportunities he had to educate himself and turn his life around are the reasons that he is still alive today. Ishmael is now a human rights advocate working for girl and boy child soldiers. The book shows that it's never too late to turn around your path in life.

*Elizabeth Baroudi is currently undertaking an MA in Education, Gender and International Development at the Institute of Education*

## Children and Conflict in a Changing World

Machel Study 10 Year Strategic Review, UNICEF (2007) - A/62/228

Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy

Review by Lyndsay Bird

The Machel Study 10 Year Strategic Review produced by UNICEF and the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict builds on the 1996 Machel Report that challenged the world to improve the care and protection of children affected by armed conflict. The 2007 report provides an overview of key issues, outlines findings from a strategic review, evaluates progress and provides a response on the way forward.

The report highlights that much progress has been made through the improvement of legal and normative child rights frameworks and provision/relevance of demobilization and reintegration programmes which now include special measures for children. The prioritization of education for children affected by conflict has also been positively reinforced over the past 10 years. This has been helped by the establishment of the education cluster of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) which works within the framework of improving understanding of the importance of continuing education throughout an emergency.

However, the report cautions that there is still much to be done to prevent armed groups

from violating children's rights. Children increasingly bear the brunt of the consequences of war, through displacement or the murder or loss of kin. Although the direct consequences of war have received improved attention in the last decade, the indirect loss of services, particularly of education, has often been overlooked.

The report recommends that specific education initiatives for 'survivors' should target boys and men. However, there is a general lack of attention to the specific needs of boys as part of a balanced gender approach. 17 references are made to the issues affecting girls; 3 are made to the issues affecting boys despite the fact that many boys are targets for recruitment into armed forces and will have many subsequent needs. That special priority should be given to girls in order to address their needs in these contexts is rightly stressed. Yet similar emphasis is seldom placed on the particular issues facing boys (lack of education, stigmatisation and alienation) who have to reintegrate into societies that often condemn them.

Whilst the report recognises that education

initiatives for former child soldiers should not create parallel structures that appear to 'favour' them, there must be recognition of the experiences that boys as well as girls have undergone.

The report proposes a comprehensive response which centres on issues of strengthening protection systems, improving community based reintegration and transitional justice approaches, special concerns such as gender based violence, and prevention and peace-building. It states specific recommendations and advises that their implementation be reported within five years. It is now incumbent on member states to implement these recommendations.

This report is a valuable update to the landmark Machel review of 1996, and provides concrete steps towards improving the lives of children affected by armed conflict. The second edition of the report due later this year will include greater insight into education and its role in conflict prevention and peace building.

*Lyndsay Bird is an Education Advisor for Save the Children Fund, UK*

# Call for papers

## Gender: Regulation and Resistance in Education

2009 Gender and Education Association 7th Annual Conference

25-27 March 2009, Institute of Education, University of London

The conference theme 'regulation and resistance' invites engagement with gender and feminism at every level of educational practice including politics, theorising, policy creation, research methodologies, pedagogical engagement and grass-roots activism. The conference draws together an exceptional range of international speakers working at the cutting edge of feminist and

gender theory and research, and political and educational activism, including Deborah Britzman, Raewyn Connell and Gloria Ladson-Billings. The goal is to create a space for dialogue about gender and education that spans disciplinary, theoretical, political and national boundaries.

You are invited to submit abstracts of no

more than 300 words addressing the conference themes and sub-themes. The closing date for abstracts is September 30, 2008.

Visit the website for the Gender and Education Association 2009 Conference, Institute of Education, London  
[www.ioe.ac.uk/fps/genderconference09](http://www.ioe.ac.uk/fps/genderconference09)

## Weblinks

### The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality

Gary Barker, Instituto Promundo, Brazil

This report was presented at a discussion to assess the progress of conclusions on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women in 2004.

Available at: [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw51/panel%20men%20and%20boys/Gary%20Barker%20-%20paper.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw51/panel%20men%20and%20boys/Gary%20Barker%20-%20paper.pdf)

### Positive Discipline in the Inclusive, Learning-friendly Classroom: A Guide for Teachers and Teacher Educators

UNESCO

Embracing diversity: Toolkit for creating inclusive, learning-friendly environments, Booklet 1

This toolkit for teachers, school administrators, and education officials provides practical guidelines on how to effectively manage students in the classroom by giving non-violent ways to deal with behavioural challenges positively and pro-actively.

Available at: [http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/appeal/IE/Publications\\_and\\_reports/Pos\\_Dis-final.pdf](http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/appeal/IE/Publications_and_reports/Pos_Dis-final.pdf)

### Young Men and HIV Prevention: A Toolkit for Action

Promundo Brazil

This online guide emphasises the benefits of working with young men in HIV and AIDS prevention and provides practical information on how to design, implement and evaluate activities.

Available at: <http://www.promundo.org.br/352>

### A Directory of Civil Society Organisations Working in Partnership with Men to End Violence Against Women in the UNESCAP Region and Beyond

UNESCO Asia and Pacific Region

This comprehensive resource lists various organisations from around the world who are working towards ending violence against women.

<http://www.unescap.org/esid/GAD/Resources/NewTableEVAWM.pdf>

### Child Soldiers Global Report, 2008

The International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers

This document details the current situation with regard to child soldiers and explains that not nearly enough is being done to end the use of children in war and conflict.

<http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/>

## Letters

Thank you very much for the interesting newsletter, it has been very informative, and we look forward to receiving more.

Phosile Tracy Sichinga

Director, Training Community Initiative for Transformation (TRACIT), Malawi

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I was pleased to receive Issue 20 and am interested in the topics you cover. I wonder however whether the language could be made more reader-friendly. Terms such as "technisation", disaggregating data or feminist activism are hard for the 'lay' person to understand. Could these be translated into simpler language without 'dumbing down' the meaning?

Doreen Crawford, Pakistan

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Congratulations on the resumption of the Equals newsletter. I looked at the one you've sent and found it very informative and useful.

Geeta Kingdon, Oxford, UK

## WRITE NOW!

Do you have a particular view that you want to raise in Equals or a comment to make about the newsletter in general?

Contact the Editors:

[a.north@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:a.north@ioe.ac.uk)

or by post:

Amy North, EFPS, Institute of Education, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL

# Forthcoming events

3 – 8 August	The XVII International AIDS Conference Mexico City, Mexico <a href="http://www.aids2008.org">http://www.aids2008.org</a>
10 -21 August	Fourth World Youth Congress Quebec, Canada
8 September	World Literacy Day
17 -19 September	Asia Pacific Regional Policy Workshop on Overseas Development Aid for Education For All Manila, Philippines
19 September	Convention on the Rights of the Child Day of General Discussion Geneva, Switzerland <a href="http://www.ineesite.org/page.asp?pid=1463">http://www.ineesite.org/page.asp?pid=1463</a>
25 September	UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon Global MDGs event New York
September, 2008	UNESCO closing meetings on literacy Baku, Azerbaijan
September, 2008	63rd Session of General Assembly (Review of literacy) New York
November, 2008	11th International Forum of the Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID) Cape Town, South Africa
23 - 3 April 2009	Men Engage Global Conference Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

## Contact Details

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Sheila Aikman

Beyond Access was set up in January 2003.  
Its main aims are:

- To contribute to achieving MDG 3 – promoting gender equality and empowering women – by generating and critically examining knowledge and practice regarding gender equality and education
- To provide appropriate resources to share and disseminate for the purpose of influencing the policies of government departments, national and international NGOs and international institutions including UN agencies

Please contact us with any comments or enquiries:

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or [www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/issues/education/gender\\_equality.html](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/issues/education/gender_equality.html)

The views expressed in this newsletter are entirely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the project, their partners or sponsors

## The Commonwealth Education Fund

In 2001, British Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown announced the creation of a Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF) with a £10 million initial grant. CEF's main focus is on strengthening civil society's input into the Education for All (EFA) process to achieve international goals in low-income Commonwealth countries. In an unprecedented collaboration, ActionAid, OxfamGB and Save the Children UK agreed to act as co-managing agencies of the CEF.

The CEF promotes the right to education by ensuring that governments fulfil their commitments through sound education policies, transparent and accountable financial procedures, and quality education provision that reaches the most marginalised girls and boys.

A special CEF project, the Gender Equity in Education Project (GEEP) is working with partners to help build their capacity to carry out gender analysis and advocate for gender equitable policies, budgets, and practices.

This issue of Equals has been supported by the GEEP project.

The CEF program itself will end in 2008, but it is hoped that recent research into sustaining funding for civil society advocacy in education will further this way of working at a national level beyond 2008.

For more information visit:  
<http://www.commonwealtheducationfund.org/>

