

## Going Beyond Access

Chloe Challender and Amy North



Credit: Janet Raynor

Schoolgirls from Bangladesh, where there have been large increases in the number of girls attending school following a secondary school stipend scheme.

As the third year of the Beyond Access project – and a crucial year for gender equality in education – draws to a close, this article considers how to progress in going ‘beyond access’. Our project is premised on the understanding that getting equal numbers of girls and boys into school is a necessary but not sufficient condition for achieving gender equality in education. So what are the decisive changes that create true equality of opportunity and outcome? What have we learned that we can take forward beyond 2005 to ensure that the gender equality and education Millennium Development Goals are met as soon as possible, and certainly by 2015?

UNESCO’s newly launched Education For All Global Monitoring Report (GMR) has one answer: “A sea change in policy is required, one that goes beyond a purely quantitative target focused on individual learners towards the broader goal of building literate societies”. Implicit in this recommendation is a holistic approach to gender equitable education that works across all levels – families, communities, districts, national governments and the international policy-making arena.

Stark statistics from the 2006 UNESCO report affirm that this ‘sea change’ is an urgent priority. Only just over half of 180 countries for which 2002 data are available

have reached gender parity in primary education. This drops to one third of countries at secondary level, with a marked regional pattern – shockingly, no country from South and West Asia has achieved parity at secondary level. Even more shocking is the fact that only 3% of countries have achieved parity in tertiary education.

Many of those girls who have made it to school face the threat daily of having to leave prematurely. 76 of 92 countries studied for the UNESCO report still charge some type of fee in primary education. This put girls at serious risk of being withdrawn from the school register if families are forced to prioritise which child they can afford to educate – the preference is still more often for boys. Poor quality education disincentivises parents from taking financial and safety-related risks to educate their daughters. In only a quarter of the approximately 100 developing countries with data for 2002 have all primary teachers received some training. Of this minority who have been trained, gender concerns are unlikely to have been afforded adequate time or emphasis in a squeezed teacher training schedule. What is more, HIV/AIDS is doubling attrition rates for teachers in some countries. The increasingly female face of the pandemic, particularly in southern Africa, is diminishing already deficient numbers of women teachers, especially in rural areas.

### Looking beyond numbers

But in tandem with this negative picture, there are signs that a clearer understanding of what will produce UNESCO’s “sea change” is developing. Work on broader measures of progress on gender equality in education – which look beyond mere enrolment figures - is taking place. This will help bring about a more accountable and open process of assessing quality and equality of education.

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The two most recent GMRs have used the Education Development Index (EDI) in an attempt to bring together information on access, quality and the gender gap. The *Beyond Access* project has developed the Gender Equality in Education Index (GEEI), which goes on from the EDI to measure gender equality rather than parity. Instead of relying on enrolment statistics, the GEEI uses net attendance rates to give a more realistic indication of girls' presence in school. The GEEI incorporates an assessment of educational quality by looking at the effect of education on women's ability to flourish as adults (by incorporating UNDP's Gender Development Index as a weighted measure, rather than simply looking at adult literacy rates).



Credit: © UNICEF Madagascar/2005/Kitesakizi

Girls learning through play in Madagascar.

### The importance of a holistic approach

As the GMR points out, achieving gender equality entails interventions inside and outside the classroom. Only through a holistic approach promoting wide-ranging societal change - community sensitisation; safety and sanitation; teaching and curricula; cost and resources - will true equality be brought about.

The Bangladesh case study (see Box) is a clear example of how achieving gender equality in education requires such a holistic approach that goes beyond simply getting more girls into school. By taking measures to increase the participation of girls in primary and secondary school, Bangladesh has undoubtedly taken an extremely important first step towards greater gender equality. However unless measures are taken to ensure that the school environment encourages girls to learn, and unless the external factors that prevent girls and women from being able to use and benefit from their education are addressed, the achievement of MDG 3 - gender equality and the empowerment of women - is likely to remain elusive.

#### Bangladesh: parity or equality?

Bangladesh has been much lauded as an example of a country where efforts to improve girls' education have been successful. Large increases in the number of girls attending school have followed a secondary school stipend system targeting girls, and a campaign to raise awareness of the importance of girls' education. Indeed, according to official records, Bangladesh has achieved the 2005 MDG target of gender getting equal numbers of girls and boys enrolled in both primary and secondary school.

This success has led to claims by some that the country has achieved MDG 3. It was also undoubtedly one of the reasons behind Bangladesh being showcased in the 2005 Human Development report (UNDP, 2005) as one of the countries making the

**“A sea change in policy is required, one that goes beyond a purely quantitative target focused on individual learners towards the broader goal of building literate societies”**

most rapid progress. The report claims that, “Improved access to health and education for women, allied with expanded opportunities for employment and access to microcredit, has expanded choice and empowered women. While gender disparities still exist, women have become increasingly powerful catalysts for development, demanding greater control over fertility and birth spacing, education for their daughters and access to services”.

A closer examination, however, reveals that despite the country's notable achievements in getting girls into school, Bangladesh is in fact far from achieving gender equality. This year, once again Bangladesh scores extremely poorly on the Gender Empowerment Measure, ranking 79th out of the 80 countries included. The proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament is only 2% (UNDP 2005) and the ratio of literate women to men aged 20-24 is 55:71.

Such inequalities are also reflected in school exam results that reveal that, despite the encouraging progress made towards gender parity in school enrolment, Bangladesh is far from achieving gender parity in school achievement. The 2005 results for the Secondary School Certificate show that girls are less likely to be entered for the final exam, and less likely to pass, and that these imbalances combine to make a 12% gender gap.

A number of factors continue to prevent girls from achieving well at school and being able to enjoy their education on an equal footing with the boys. These include less time for study at home because of their household duties, less chance of getting the necessary private tuition to get good results, and reduced chances of going to good

schools because of financial priorities or concerns related to mobility or security. In addition, the widespread perception of girls' education being important to enhance (rather than challenge) traditional cultural values - making women better wives and mothers - combined with high levels of early marriage and a lack of job opportunities for educated women, limits the extent to which girls and women are able to benefit fully from, and be empowered by their education.

So while Bangladesh has indeed made impressive gains in terms of parity of enrolment, there is still a long way to go towards equality.

*Box compiled with thanks to Janet Raynor*

#### Beyond Access: Learning for Action

The importance of a holistic approach to achieving gender equality has been highlighted repeatedly over the lifetime of our project and is a key theme in the *Beyond Access/Oxfam Programme Insights* that we are launching next month. This series of papers set out the key learning from the project and offers recommendations for those working on gender equitable education in government and civil society organizations.

Each paper focuses on a particular issue considered crucial to understanding what must be done to achieve gender equality in education. These include: pedagogy and curriculum, looking at how teaching and curriculum can enhance gender equality in schools; adult education, highlighting how the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) do not directly address the issue of adult education and literacy, in spite of these being essential for achieving the Millennium targets; and education for nomadic and pastoralist children, exploring the challenges involved in providing for children who are beyond the reach of mainstream, formal education. Other important themes such as HIV/AIDs and resources issues cross-cut the series.



Schoolgirls in Bangladesh (see Box on p.2 for case study).

An introductory paper to the *Beyond Access Programme Insights* introduces some of the cross cutting themes, identifying areas in which action must be taken. These include addressing the social factors that limit demand for girls' and women's education; ensuring that education is seen as valuable and relevant by girls and women themselves as well as by their communities and addressing school cultures to ensure that schools are made welcoming for girls. Ensuring that teachers, especially female teachers, are given the support they need to make schools transformative places in which gender stereotypes and inequalities can be challenged is crucial, as is eradicating sexual harassment and violence against female teachers and students.

The state has an overall responsibility to ensure that formal education is provided equitably to all children and to ensure that basic education is free. However NGOs and civil society groups can play an important role, for example in advocating for gender equitable education. The participation of girls, women and communities in education planning at the local level is essential to tackle barriers to gender equality. The *Beyond Access* project has highlighted the value of developing innovative partnerships for gender equality in education, bringing together actors from a variety of sectors. Such partnerships must be based on equality, trust respect and dialogue and ensure that local views and indigenous knowledge are sought and respected.

As we move beyond 2005 and the missed gender parity target, it is crucial that rapid progress is made towards achieving gender equality throughout education. The *Beyond Access Programme Insights* contain practical recommendations for steps that can be taken by governments, donors, NGOs and teachers to ensure that good quality, gender equitable education is made a reality for all.

### **Beyond Access/Oxfam Education Programme Insights Key Points (Introductory paper)**

- A good quality education is a universal right.
- EFA will not be achieved without good quality gender equitable education – access to poor quality inequitable education leads to dropout.
- The culture within schools strongly influences retention and achievement for girls
- Beliefs, practices and conditions in the wider society influence whether girls stay in school and the kind of teaching and learning that takes place in school.
- Governments have a responsibility to ensure formal basic education is provided equitably and free of charges which affect girls negatively
- Tackling barriers to gender equality in schooling requires the participation of girls and women in the design, planning and implementing of education
- A quality education rejects gender discrimination and social injustice.

### **“Achieving gender equality entails interventions inside and outside the classroom, using a holistic approach promoting wide-ranging societal change”**

For more information or to receive copies of the *Beyond Access Programme Insights*, please go to [www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/beyondaccess](http://www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/beyondaccess) or contact Amy North, [ANorth@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:ANorth@oxfam.org.uk).

For more information on the GMR, see [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

For more information on the GEEI, see the *Beyond Access* website [www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/beyondaccess](http://www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/beyondaccess) or the website of the Commonwealth Secretariat ([www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org)), who this month publish a paper on the GEEI and Commonwealth countries in Africa.

# Letter from the Editor

As the *Beyond Access* project's third year draws to a close and the project progresses into a new phase, I too will be moving on from my post of Editor. This is with considerable sadness: three years has flown by and putting the newsletter together has been one of the most enjoyable aspects of my job! *Equals* does seem to have filled a valuable niche for conveying new ideas and initiatives about gender equality in education, and during the newsletter's first three years I feel we have only been able to skim the surface of the huge variety of innovative, dynamic projects and processes in motion for achieving education for all.

*Equals* has evolved constantly since 2003, with changes to the publication's design and content ensuring that the format has remained fresh. But other aspects of the newsletter have remained constant. Certain regular contributors have equipped *Equals* with a yardstick by which to measure change on the ground. We must thank, in particular, Shobha Bajpai in Madhya Pradesh, India, who we have re-visited seven times to get a teacher's assessment of whether global policies on gender are filtering down to her school (for the answer see page 7). Twenty other teachers must also be thanked for the interviews they have given to *Equals*. Regular 'Partner Reports' from Oxfam have been another valuable way of circulating 'real life' examples of ways to address gender gaps in education. Huge thanks must go to all those practitioners, researchers and policy-makers who have contributed articles, reports, letters, photos and reviews over the last three years. Thanks are also due to the whole *Beyond Access* team, our network of translators and supporting staff in our institutions including reprographics, design, publications and print staff.

*Beyond Access* will move into a new phase in 2006. It is envisaged that *Equals* will continue to be published – probably at quarterly intervals until a long-term funding source is identified. We hope that the tragic failure to meet the first MDG target seeking gender parity in school access by 2005 will spur the global community into action on securing education for all. So please continue reading and circulating *Equals*, and do send your support and comments to what is – we believe – the only regular newsletter focusing on gender equality in education worldwide.

*Chloe*

Chloe Challerder

# Menstruation and Body Awareness: Critical Issues for Girls' Education

Jackie Kirk and Marni Sommer

Adolescence and puberty can be difficult times for all young people, but for girls in many developing countries, puberty, and especially the onset of menstruation, pose particular challenges. In social contexts where these issues are not openly discussed or where there is stigma and/or taboos surrounding menstruation, girls may have very little understanding of what is happening to them and their bodies. A lack of adequate sanitary materials and private facilities makes it even more difficult for girls to have positive attitudes towards their bodies. In some places, the inability to easily manage menstruation may mean that their activities are severely limited during their monthly cycle.

All of these issues relate to and have implications for girls' education. For example:

- The onset of menstruation (menarche) often signals an end to girlhood – and therefore also to education - as parents begin to consider marriage prospects for their daughter
- School curricula typically do not cover the topic of menstruation and puberty in a very girl friendly way and so do not help girls to understand the changes in their maturing bodies
- Schools often lack adequate latrines and necessary water supplies for girls to comfortably change sanitary pads and wash themselves in privacy.
- Girls who lack adequate sanitary materials may miss classes each month during their period and/or may be very uncomfortable and unable to participate in class out of fear that they will have an 'accident', e.g. spotting on their uniform.
- Male teachers and students often show insensitivity to menstruation

Fortunately there is increasing recognition of the potential impact of providing separate, private and safe latrines for girls to improve school access, attendance and retention, especially for adolescents. UNICEF is especially committed to ensuring girl-friendly sanitation in schools. Adequate facilities however are only part of the solution. We must also ensure that girls are provided with sanitary protection to enable them to confidently continue attending class right through their menstrual cycles. In addition, providing the physical or material means for 'menstrual management' does not necessarily empower girls who lack information about their own bodies. Such knowledge is critical if girls are to feel comfortable and confident about coping with the normal developmental

changes they are experiencing, and attain a sense of positive body awareness.

An 'Oxford Roundtable', co-organized by UNICEF and the International Water and Sanitation Center (IRC) in January 2005, recognized the need for greater global and local attention to menstrual management to facilitate girls' school participation. More than 100 people came together in Oxford, UK to discuss barriers in girls' education related to water and sanitation. The participants included Ministers of Education and Water Supply, policy makers, program specialists, donors, relevant institutions, development banks, members of the private sector, and most importantly, school children and young people

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from eight developing countries. The joint statement released after the roundtable included the charge that along with the need for separate latrines for boys and girls, those for girls should have designs that "take account of the special needs of girls, related to protection, privacy and suitability for menstrual management.

There are some promising new initiatives addressing menstruation and body awareness challenges that exist for many girls. It is

becoming clear that multi-sectoral approaches are needed; experts from health, water and sanitation, and the education sectors work best together. Given the many cultural or traditional beliefs around menstrual blood and menarche, the most promising approaches are informed by social and ethnographic perspectives on the significance of menstruation for girls and their families.

Emerging from this work are a number of key recommendations to be taken up by different actors such as NGOs, women's groups and youth organizations, governments, schools and health providers and researchers.

- Adequate girl-friendly sanitary facilities should be prioritized for all school construction and improvement projects and be designed and developed with the full participation of girls.
- Especially in crisis, emergency and early reconstruction contexts, the Minimum Standards in Education in Emergencies (MSEE) and guidelines such as those produced by the Reproductive Health Response in Conflict (RHRC) Consortium and IRC, the International Water and Sanitation Centre should be followed. Such guidelines should be used as advocacy tools to encourage donor funding for girl-friendly education, health and sanitation projects.
- Girls are important stakeholders and 'knowers' of menstruation and reproductive health in their communities. They should be active participants in planning, implementing and evaluating any programming interventions.
- Sanitary materials should be made available for girls who would otherwise not attend school. Efforts must be made to ensure the sustainability of such supplies (e.g. by teaching girls to make their own pads).
- School curricula should include puberty and menstruation, and the lessons need to be delivered by confident, knowledgeable and preferably female teachers. This means that the topic must be included in teacher training curricula, for men and for women, with female teachers in particular prepared



Reproductive Health Sessions St. George Secondary School, Mendefera, Eritrea.

Credit: CRS

for both formal instruction and informal discussion of the topic.

- In contexts where there are no female teachers to discuss puberty and menstruation with girls, collaborations should be created with appropriate local women – for example, nurses, health workers, midwives, community leaders – who can come to the school and teach, but who also can visit on a regular basis and be available to answer girls' questions and concerns as they arise.
- The school should aim to create an environment in which open discussion of menstruation is possible. Teachers and school authorities – perhaps in partnership with local women's groups – can advocate to parents that their daughters attend school throughout their periods, and that they be provided with adequate sanitary protection from the family budget.
- Further research is required, preferably action research involving girls about, for example, the long term impact for girls who have been involved in menstruation-related education initiatives, about the effectiveness of school water and sanitation projects on girls' retention rates, and how to most appropriately address local cultural beliefs about menstruation. It is critical that new interventions be rigorously evaluated and that we continue to identify critical gaps in knowledge.

#### **Providing Comfort Kits to Girls and Women: the Sudan Basic Education Program**

Few girls in Southern Sudan are able to buy or even make their own sanitary pads and so those who are enrolled in school are usually forced to miss class during menstruation. Girls in boarding schools normally stay in their dormitories, lying out their period and taking regular showers. Those in day school merely stay home. This means that girls miss school every month and are disadvantaged in their learning. To address this issue, the Sudan Basic Education Program (SBEP) distributes 'comfort kits', containing a set of reuseable cotton sanitary pads and underwear, to girls in secondary schools and women in teacher training institutions. An early impact assessment indicates the significant impact these kits on girls' attendance and on their levels of confidence and participation in class. Furthermore, the open distribution of the kits in school has raised awareness amongst teachers and school administrators and made it much more possible for girls to talk about menstruation at school. Assessment also revealed that few girls really understood the biological process of menstruation. The SBEP has now developed a simple booklet explaining menstruation and other bodily changes associated with puberty to include in future comfort kit distribution.

#### **Improving menstrual knowledge and management for school girls in Eritrea** By Rozina Michael, CRS Eritrea

Catholic Relief Services (CRS), in collaboration with the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), found that many Eritrean schoolgirls either miss school entirely or feel uncomfortable at school during their menstrual cycle, and hence report a decrease in their

participation and performance in the classroom. To address this challenge, CRS initiated a girls' empowerment project aimed at increasing schoolgirls' reproductive health and hygiene knowledge, improving girls' confidence in the classroom through extracurricular tutoring on basic subjects, and facilitating their school attendance during menstruation through the construction of girls' latrines and the provision of sanitary materials, soap and undergarments. Under the reproductive health awareness objective, the project produced an adolescent reproductive training manual that was used for training-of-trainers (TOT) of adolescent peer educators. Weekly TOT workshops were conducted over a seven-month period for selected adolescent girl educators, who subsequently disseminated the knowledge to their peers. Girls' toilets were rehabilitated in the target schools, with a new girls' latrine currently under construction in one school in collaboration with the parent-teacher association. A recent evaluation of the two-year project demonstrated that girls' attendance had increased during their menstrual cycles in the target schools, and that as a result of the project's hygiene education, the frequency of changing sanitary materials has increased from once per day to two or three times per day. Lessons learned included the need to sensitise parents to girls' reproductive needs; the importance of strengthening linkages with school parent-teacher associations; and the need to develop linkages between schools and local factories producing menstrual sanitary supplies.

**“Many Eritrean schoolgirls either miss school entirely or feel uncomfortable at school during their menstrual cycle, and hence report a decrease in their participation and performance in the classroom.”**



Menstruation education with Vacha.

#### **Working on Menstruation with Girls in Mumbai, India: Vacha Women's Resource Centre**

By Sonal Shukla, Vacha Women's Resource Centre

Menstruation is seen as a polluting factor among Hindus and menstruating girls and women are seen as untouchable. Even where strict untouchability is not observed, girls learn from early adolescence that they may not touch anything in the kitchen or visit a temple during menstruating. Practising untouchability against menstruating girls is bad for their self image at a crucial stage in their development. It is common belief that pickles rot if made by a menstruating girl/woman. In research and training work with girls and teachers at Vacha Women's Resource Centre we found that while there is awareness of the intricate system of taboos and sanctions there is very little actual knowledge of the process of menstruation.

To develop a teaching module for girls from poverty affected families in urban and rural areas in western India we made a body chart of cloth layered with body parts, including blood circulation and respiratory systems, attached with velcro so that girls could pull them apart and stick them together. This facilitated separating menstruation from socio-religious misconceptions and showing it as an important biological phenomenon. Discussions of girls' own physical and social experiences were encouraged. They raised many questions, particularly on abdomen and back pain and menstruation flow. Girls were highly excited and shared this knowledge with their mothers, one even with her father! Some teachers asked us to have special lessons for themselves. We could do this during some major gender training programmes in several districts under Education For All schemes.

Helping girls and women change their minds about their bodies being polluting agents will require multi-pronged strategies as these beliefs are supported by family, caste and religious systems. They are also internalized and perpetuated by women. One other way Vacha is working to dispel such myths is through health fairs organized for girls in which there is a special booth for private consultation, and teaching of yoga exercises to reduce pain.

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# Multi-Organizational Partnerships: The Alliance for Community Action in Female Education - Uganda

Stephanie Garrow

One important way of securing action on girls' education is creating connections between community members and civil society organisations. Through joint projects and small grants people can come together to cement new strategies for meeting the educational needs for girls. An example of this comes from the Alliance for Community Action in Female Education in Uganda, a partnership between the Ministries of Education, UNICEF, international donors and local NGOs and CBOs. The Alliance was initiated by the

Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) in 1998 and hosted by the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE). Its aim was to support the role that African NGOs and CBOs play in improving girls' education.

**“Alliance Uganda highlights the unique role that successful multi-organizational partnerships can play in catalysing progress on girls' education.”**

Under the initiative, innovative strategies for community action have been implemented. For instance, through a small grant a group of pregnant girls and single mothers were able to develop curriculum and materials and to hire tutors in order to finish their secondary schooling by correspondence. This type of financial support not only helped provide them with practical resources, but created a forum for single mothers to organize themselves strategically around their right to continue their schooling.

A study conducted as part of my doctoral research carried out between 2000 and 2003 highlighted key features of the Uganda Alliance. The research used a feminist perspective to examine inter-organizational relationships within the Alliance. It experimented with participatory methodology as a way to explore how people within organizations 'live' and understand inter-organizational relationships – and how these strategic relationships enhance gender transformation in education. The methodology involved using collaborative research activities, social mapping, interviews and focus groups to examine the perspectives and positions of the organizations themselves. This enabled a process of promoting women's own thinking and learning about gender equality challenges in their work. The research identified policy and practice lessons that help us think differently about strategic alliances for girls' education and the factors that contribute to their success.

One significant finding was the importance of involving people and grassroots organisations who are often sidelined in multi-organizational partnerships. Small, non-formal organizations would not usually be targeted by more high profile/formal partnerships, as they may be seen as not having 'sufficient' capacity to provide relevant input to policy. For more inclusive partnerships to work, the Alliance found that building local leadership capacity - primarily of women – was essential.

Another aspect of these innovative partnerships was involving district governments. The participation of district officials ensures that girls' education issues are more deeply understood and that these understandings are transferred appropriately to

central government planners and policy makers. The Alliance supported a series of local sensitization workshops and mobilization meetings between district government officials and local community groups, as a way to build stronger relationships and conditions for mutual influence between these different stakeholder groups. One of these such meetings, in the remote Nebbi District of Uganda (near the conflict zone in the North) evolved into its own Nebbi District Alliance which became a formal network of district officials, CBOs, community leaders, religious groups and families, committed to working collectively to manage the challenges of gender and education.

The benefits of initiating and building capacity in these types of local networks were also felt by central policy makers. One senior policy official from the Ministry of Education described the benefits of this type of exchange: “The Ministry is now changing its perception towards what central level policies actually work for the communities. We know many of our policies can't reach communities in the furthest corners. Therefore the system of working through community based organizations and their own local networks is the way to go. Because these are the people living within the community who can influence change in attitude. Because here is a neighbour talking to a neighbour.”

Finally, the research highlighted the importance of seeing partnerships through a 'gender lens'. This is a sustainable approach to girls' education partnerships ensuring that processes are examined and shared in other development contexts. All too often, given the prominence of the MDGs and other international policy drives promoting gender mainstreaming, collaborative strategies developed to achieve gender equality in education are often designed and work in a relatively gender-neutral or gender blind way. This means that the same collaborative networks aiming to achieve gender equality, risk excluding the voices and participation of women from their own activities. The study of the Alliance highlights the unique role that successful multi-organizational partnerships can play in catalysing progress on girls' education. The research helps to communicate why the Alliance have been effective at promoting community participation, mutual influence and collaborative policy making.

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**Uganda Alliance partners 'mapping' inter-organizational relationships during a participatory research workshop facilitated by Stephanie Garrow.**

Credit: Stephanie Garrow

# Talking with Teachers

**Shobha Bajpai, India**

*In her first interview with **Equals**, in October 2003, Shobha Bajpai - a teacher at Uda Government Middle School, Harda in Madhya Pradesh, India - said that gender equality "can't be achieved through powerful speeches or the inclusion of one or two gender chapters. There needs to be a revolution in the whole education system ... the curriculum, the syllabus, the rules, the examinations, the way we teach ... everything." Now we return to ask her - "Is there evidence of a revolution - or even the seeds of one?"*

Many would argue that global initiatives such as the MDGs take time to filter to the local level, but India's education policy has been claiming to implement gender concerns across curricula, textbooks, teacher training and management structures for almost 20 years - since, in fact, I joined Uda School.

In my opinion very little has changed, including during the last few years whilst I've been writing for *Equals*. It is difficult to give my opinion on what has changed in my district since 2003 due to a lack of information on progress. I would need to invest a lot of time to get a clear idea of progress, and even if I could find this time my questions may not be answered. So my answers come from my experience of local schools and discussions with NGO members, local friends and colleagues met at trainings and official activities.

## What has changed?

Reforms have been introduced, through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA - a national mission for the universalisation of elementary schooling), launched in our district in 2000. The SSA reforms are broad, designed to pursue quality, equity and equality.

Whilst all elements of education are supposedly undergoing reform, the kinds of changes that I feel are necessary aren't yet obvious. Most elements of the SSA are confused for teachers, who don't have a clear understanding of what the government wants to achieve - its most immediate impact was an increase in the amount of non-teaching tasks (especially data collection) we had to undertake.

This period may be one of building foundations but I feel these should emerge from debate and collaboration. Whatever the route of this reform, we have not yet experienced the changes in the curriculum, syllabus, rules, examinations and teaching styles - the kind of changes that I've talked about in *Equals* Issues 4, 5, 6 and 8 - that are necessary for greater quality and equality.

However, without doubt some things are changing. The government have been funding school building and enhancement programmes. Nearly every village school has toilet facilities and work is in progress through SSA for those that don't. A number of surveys are underway to ensure that every child is counted and attending school. Efforts are being made to reach out to children who have dropped out of school through bridging courses that end in 5th and 8th class exams, and boarding hostels provide facilities for girls to attend these courses. Free textbooks are now available for Dalit and Adivasi boys, and all girls from classes 6 to 8. Free uniforms are provided for all girls from class 1 to 8 and bicycles are provided for Dalit and Adivasi girls who live more than 1 km from school.

Teacher training has been decentralised and the training is conducted locally, which makes a big difference. Harda is supposed to get its own District Institute of Education and Training, but I am not sure when this will happen. The length of training has been increased, but I do not know anything about the content and approach. If the trainers are good, then the trainees will obviously benefit, but I also cannot say anything about the local trainers.

Girls' enrolment and their completion of 5, 8, 10 and 12 years of schooling is gradually improving, and the exam results show that more children, and more girls, are achieving at these stages. I do not, however, have access to the statistics. In 1986, when I joined Uda School, there were no girls enrolled in Standard 8. In 1987, there were two. By 2003, girls made up 40 per cent of those completing Standard 8.

## Where does change still need to happen?

In relation to the curriculum, I think that in Harda and some other districts we've actually made a huge backward step that has consequences for the pursuit of gender equality. When I joined Uda in 1986, the school was following the science curriculum of the NGO Eklavya, and had just started following their social science curriculum. This initiative was a showcase example of state and civil-society collaboration, with an NGO developing curriculum and materials for use in government schools and supporting/training government teachers. We (along with many other schools) followed these curricula approaches until 2002. The curricula approaches addressed gender injustice - girls and women figured prominently and weren't continually presented as helpless. We could discuss women's rights, gender bias, the caste system and discrimination, democracy and



Credit: Elspeth Page

## Shobha Bajpai with Middle School pupils

the ways of government and so on. But it wasn't just that - students found these approaches more interesting, so in themselves they were better for achievement and equity. All Eklavya interventions were, however, closed by the government in 2002, despite much opposition. We are settling back to state curricula but it seems sad that such lessons have been shelved rather than built on.

HIV and AIDS are still not addressed until High School level (Class 9 and above) but I am not sure of the impact of these sessions. Teachers and pupils still find it very difficult to deal with all associated issues. What is equally sad is that, by this stage, many children are no longer in education - so they miss out on all HIV/AIDS awareness education.

Some organisations are working on gender issues, but individuals are involved only if they are personally interested - and as yet, not many seem to be. I do not know whether any workshops have been organised by the Government, but, given my interest and people's knowledge of it, I am sure I would know if they have. National and state women's committees are continuing their work, but I am unsure of the impact.

Changes in the education system are taking place, but very gradually - largely because societal gender perceptions and behaviours are only changing very gradually. We make slow steps forward, and are often knocked back again. Greater support and pressure from all levels - local, state, national and global - is needed to enable greater progress.

# Book Review

## Beyond Access: Transforming Policy and Practice for Gender Equality in Education

Sheila Aikman and Elaine Unterhalter (Eds)  
Oxford: Oxfam (2005)  
ISBN: 0-85598-529-1  
Pages: 263

**Changu Mannathoko**

The title of this book promises much. The volume looks for evidence that initiatives described have the capacity to lead to transformational education. Do changes in policy and practice provide girls with the opportunity to realize their full potential and assist in the development of a fair and democratic society? This edited collection succeeds in its totality. That is why dipping into a chapter here and there will not assuage a hunger for the provocative and practical initiatives described and analyzed.

The cumulative effect of the contributory chapters is impressive. Part One investigates the current scope of gender inequalities in education and the type of barriers that exist to achieving gender equality as per Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3. The first chapter reviews four perspectives for analyzing gender, education and development. A combination of the Capability Approach with other analytical approaches leads to an emerging comprehensive analytical framework which is utilized throughout the book.

Another strength of Part One is Chapter 3 on Measuring Gender Equality in Education. The chapter comes up with the Gender Equality in Education Index (GEEI), an

alternative means of measuring gender equality gains and losses in and through education. The GEEI weights four widely used measures of: girls' primary attendance; girls' survival rate over five years of primary schooling; girls' secondary NER; and the Gender Development Index (GDI). Thus evidence-based information from UNICEF, UNESCO and UNDP is put together to calculate the GEEI. The comparison of GEEI in Commonwealth countries of Africa from the 1990s to 2003 tells a shocking story. Out of the top-scoring six countries in 1993 (Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe) only Botswana, South Africa and Namibia have made gains in the subsequent decade, up to

2003. In Asia, countries with large populations (Bangladesh, India and Pakistan) generally score low on the GEEI. However, starting from a low threshold there were large gains in Asian countries like Bangladesh and Nepal between 1993-2003. Meanwhile, Latin American countries such as Trinidad have experienced a fall in GEEI during the 1990s. The writers explain these trends by noting that countries with devastating histories of war and autocratic government are at the bottom of the league, whilst those with democratic governments are at the top. The GEEI is an invaluable tool for measuring the size of the challenge before all of us and the level of advocacy required to reach MDG2 and MDG3 by 2015.

Part Two consists of six chapters that address transforming action by changing policy through practice – and how changes in government policy have promoted changes in practice towards gender equality. Part Three uses three chapters to analyze several innovative approaches being used at school and community levels

**“Beyond Access is an important book and provides useful learning around transformative policy and practice towards gender equality in education.**

**I recommend the book for development workers and students in universities globally.”**

working towards girls' and women's equality. Chapter 10 on learning about HIV/AIDS in schools demonstrates the gendered character of HIV education and

how the pandemic is rooted in issues around masculinities and femininities. The chapter underscores how the training of facilitators needs to move from awareness to behavioural change. I would take this further to state that training should go beyond behavioural change to include social change. These young people are not living in isolation and some of the challenges and realities with which they are confronted are socio-culturally and economically based.

The book is not without gaps, inevitably. Current debates that do not appear include a human rights-based approach to programming and community capacity



development (HRBAP/CCD), poverty eradication strategies, inter-sectoral social protection mechanisms, orphans and other vulnerable children (OVCs), new aid modalities and sector wide approaches (SWAps). Case studies pertaining to SWAps include the recent gender audit in Lesotho's Ministry of Education which was funded through sector development plans. In Zambia, interventions from the girls' education programme - namely re-entry policy and scholarships for girls - have been integrated into the education sector process. In Uganda the framework for disadvantaged children was incorporated into the Education Sector Investment Plan in 2003.

Chapter 12 provides a case study of an innovative way of enabling education for girls in Loreto School in Kolkata, India. This chapter flags up that if quality education is to be achieved, schools should deal with factors beyond the school including partnerships with the parents, community, local authorities and faith based organizations. Loreto School is a similar example to girls' education programmes such as child friendly schools that are being rolled out by governments in selected Asian and African countries in collaboration with UNESCO and UNICEF. Such schools ensure that learning environments are also centres for the protection of both girls and boys, and vulnerable children. As with Loreto School, these schools are confronted by challenges and some successes.

*Beyond Access* is an important book and provides useful learning around transformative policy and practice towards gender equality in education. I recommend the book for development workers and students in universities globally.

*Changu Mannathoko is UNICEF Regional Education Advisor for East and Southern Africa.*



# Conference Comments

## 10th Association of Women In Development International Forum, 27-30 October 2005 Bangkok, Thailand

### Report by Chloe Challender

Taking the theme of 'How does change happen?', this huge gathering of nearly 2000 feminists, development practitioners, community organisers, researchers, human rights activists, trade unionists and policy-makers - nearly all women - was an opportunity to take stock of women's rights in development. Key concerns of the conference included women's rights in relation to increased militarisation and the rise of fundamentalisms; the spread of HIV/AIDS; the threats posed by corporate-led globalisation; economic injustice and inequality and how to include all women and girls in global dialogue.

Each of the four days during the Forum began with a plenary session on a different aspect of 'making change happen'. This was followed by a huge choice of between 15-20 parallel groups

addressing different aspects of gender and women's rights in development. Each evening had a range of book launches, films, mini-forums and dinner events.

Key messages from the Forum included the fact that, in the face of increasing militarization and responses to terrorism, this is a difficult time to instigate change. The importance of ensuring different strands of global activism are connected in order to have maximum impact was emphasized. Many women's groups expressed the view that the MDGs weren't their agenda for change - the Beijing Platform for Action remained their blueprint for development.

It was agreed that 2006 was a crucial time for engaging with the UN in order to catalyse

progress on women's rights in development. Wide-ranging reforms, especially within the Security Council, should open a door to reclaiming the UN as a space for the women's movement to work within, as it did so effectively during the conferences of the 1990s. The General Assembly's report on violence against women would be another important entry point to the UN during 2006. Another prominent issue at the Forum was how to measure progress on women's issues. Gender budgeting was highlighted as an important tool for assessing governments' commitment to making gender equality a reality.

*For further details, see [www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org)*

## Increasing Women's Participation Globally, 7-8 October 2005

### Report by Mora Oommen

On October 7-8, The Women's Research Institute (WRI) of Brigham Young University held a workshop on "Increasing Women's Participation in Education Globally" at the Sundance Resort, Utah, USA. This workshop brought together a diverse group of academics and practitioners. Participants' experiences included work in China, India, Mali, Mexico, Sub-Saharan Africa and Native American communities. The fields represented were also diverse: ranging from neuroscience, disabilities, HIV and AIDS, science and technology, higher education, women's literacy, and youth employment.

Professor Nelly Stromquist from the University of Southern California presented the key-note address focused on global efforts to address girls' and women's education through the Education for All Goals and MDGs. The presentation

compared and contrasted the two sets of goals and the current trends towards reaching these goals. She also detailed opportunities for achieving these goals. For example, she shared compelling data from a group of Latin American countries, showing the high rates of national budgets spent on international debt repayment compared to education. She spoke of the important role that individuals in the global North must play through putting pressure on their politicians, policy makers and international funding agencies.

Dr. Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, director of the WRI, and Dr. Valerie Hudson (BYU) presented the "Women's Stats Project" which is a database (in the final stages of development) of cross national statistics on women, with 216 variables coded. Discussions at the workshop focused on how the

participants might work collectively and/or individually on a number of shared aspects of women's education emerging from the workshop. Outcomes of the workshop include developing a position paper on the MDGs suggesting ways to make the MDGs more attainable, and ways to go beyond the MDGs to address additional developments in women's education (such as having better data collected, having a way to include women's testimonies in evaluations and having more specific benchmarks instead of the five-ten year goals). It is intended that parts of the position paper will be developed into easy-to-read attractive publications for use by change agents. More information on the workshop can be received by e-mailing Joanali Evans, Coordinator-WRI, [Joanali\\_Evans@byu.edu](mailto:Joanali_Evans@byu.edu).

## AIDS Education Programme/ASPBAE Working Group Meeting on HIV/AIDS Education Advocacy, 29-31 August 2005

### Report by ASPBAE

A working group meeting bringing together education and HIV/AIDS organisations met in Chiang Mai, Thailand from August 29th to 31st to explore inter-linkages and determine how to work together with added strength and dynamism.

Topical issues in each sector were discussed with a particular focus on strategies. The discussions highlighted the overlaps and gaps between the two sectors and the need for each sector to reach out beyond their own fields to draw in other significant actors to support their advocacy.

Supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was identified as an area in which both sectors are currently involved, at policy, campaign and capacity-building levels. Participants agreed to integrate Education and HIV issues more fully, for instance planning for upcoming Global Campaign for Education (GCE) policy meetings would attempt to put HIV/AIDS on to the agenda.

Mid- to long-term activities included the two sectors working together for the GCE week activities, for the planning of Asia-Pacific and

International AIDS conferences, and Harm Reduction conferences. An exchange of skills between the two sectors was considered an essential component of any long-term plan. The education field could share their training skills for teachers and trainers, and the HIV sector could share their knowledge of HIV/AIDS and the challenges with the education sector.

*For further details and the full report please contact [aspbae@vsnl.com](mailto:aspbae@vsnl.com)*

# New reports on Gender and Education

## From UNESCO:

### 2006 Education For All Global Monitoring Report

25 November will see the launch of the 2006 GMR, UNESCO's annual assessment of progress towards the EFA goals, agreed upon by over 160 countries at the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar. This year, particular emphasis is placed on the 2005 gender parity target. Another special focus of this year's report will be on 'Including the Excluded' in youth and adult literacy programmes in order to address the needs of the 771 million people worldwide who lack literacy skills (the real figure, as the report admits, is probably far higher), the majority of whom are women.

The report emphasises that making rapid progress on reducing literacy requires political leaders committing themselves to action at the highest

level, and countries adopting explicit literacy policies in order to expand quality primary and lower-secondary education, scale up youth and adult literacy programmes and develop rich literate environments. Specific areas of action include the removal of fees, which continue to form a major barrier to progress towards UPE, and addressing teacher shortage and training issues.

The report includes comprehensive statistics on education for each country and sets out the challenge that lies ahead. Although progress has been steady, it is insufficient if the EFA goals are to be achieved. In 2002, only just over half of 180 countries with data available had reached gender parity in primary education. Almost 100 million

children are still out of school and 55% of these are girls.

The report also features the EFA Development Index (EDI), which measures the overall progress of 127 countries towards meeting the EFA goals. The Index is based on indicators for the four most measurable EFA goals: universal primary education, adult literacy, and education quality and gender parity.

*The full report can be downloaded from 9 November 2005 onwards from [www.efareport.unesco.org](http://www.efareport.unesco.org). A summary of the report will be prepared in the six UN languages.*

*A full review of the 2006 GMR will be published in Equals Issue 16.*

## From ActionAid/Global Campaign for Education: Contradicting Commitments

*Contradicting Commitments* shows how, by constraining countries from increasing public expenditure in education, the International Monetary Fund is preventing them from being able to meet the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals.

The report argues that education is a critical and fundamental human right and that schools should be places where children's rights, especially the rights of girls, are respected and where injustices are challenged and lives transformed. However it claims that in order to meet the MDGs and make quality education a reality for all, new schools must be built, millions of new teachers trained and hired, obstacles such as user fees removed and schools transformed to make them accessible and welcoming to girls, disabled children, pastoralists and minorities

who are currently excluded. According to the report, doing this requires increasing domestic and external financing to education and changing the way in which countries manage their public sector expenditure in order to implement big spending increases. Case studies from Guatemala, Bangladesh, India, Cameroon Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and Sierra Leone show how the IMF's tight fiscal and monetary policies, and the binding conditions for loans agreed upon and implemented by Finance Ministries and Central banks, have led to cutbacks in the overall budget allocation to the education sector and reductions in the numbers of teachers employed and the salaries they are paid. The results are increased reliance on non-professional teachers, rising class sizes, the sacrifice of reforms necessary to improve educational

quality and the failure to implement special initiatives to reach girls and excluded groups.

*Contradicting Commitments* concludes that there is a fundamental contradiction between the MDG framework and the existing macroeconomic policies of the IMF and argues that, "If the global community is seriously committed to making progress on girls' education, as must be done if the MDGs are to have any credibility, then the first step must be to address this striking contradiction."

*The report is available at [http://www.actionaid.org.uk/775/our\\_research.html](http://www.actionaid.org.uk/775/our_research.html)*

# Weblinks

## **The state of the world's population 2005: the promise of equality: gender equity, reproductive health and the millennium development goals UNFPA (2005)**

This year's State of World Population Report's central premise is that gender equality and reproductive health are essential to the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It emphasises that despite passing the 2005 deadline, efforts to meet the MDG target eliminating gender disparities in education must continue.

Available online at <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/english/ch1/index.htm>

### **Meeting Millennium Development Goals 3 and 5**

B.N. Simwaka, S. Theobald, Y.P. Amekudzi, R. Tolhurst (British Medical Journal, 2005)

Taken from the British Medical Journal (BMJ) Africa issue, this article calls for gender equality to be put on the African agenda. MDG 5 (maternal health) is inextricably linked to MDG 3 - to promote gender equality and empower women - and for progress to be made inequalities in education, property and inheritance rights, the labour market discrimination and political participation must be addressed.

Available online at: <http://www.eldis.org/cf/rdr/rdr.cfm?doc=DOC20009>

### **Educating the world's children: patterns of growth and inequality**

Academy for Educational Development (AED), USA (2005)

This study uses new data to project when 70 poor countries, given current and historical trends, are likely to achieve the goal of universal primary education. The report highlights as case studies several countries (Morocco, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Bangladesh and Uganda) that are moving rapidly to attain universal education.

Available online at: <http://www.aed.org>

### **Speak up for grassroots women UNHabitat**

UN-HABITAT, anticipating its World Forum on urban development in June 2006, is inviting women from all over the world to put their ideas on the subject into an internet discussion and speak up on behalf of grassroots women.

See [www.habitatjam.com](http://www.habitatjam.com)

### **Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2006 – Literacy for Life UNESCO**

The 2006 Global Monitoring Report, launched on 10 November, measures the world's progress towards achieving the six Education For All goals, and especially the neglected areas of universal literacy and girls' and women's education.

Available at [www.efareport.unesco.org](http://www.efareport.unesco.org)

# Letters

I read the last issue of Equals and was eager to read more! I particularly liked the article on Somalia and the elder sister intervention carried out. I work in the area of elementary education in Madhya Pradesh, India and have a keen interest in pursuing education and gender towards development in the future.

I look forward to receiving future copies of Equals.

Regards

Deeksha Talwar  
Azim Premji Foundation  
Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh  
India

It was a great pleasure to work with you on our article about reducing gender disparity in education in Turkey for the last issue of Equals. We will definitely stay in touch. I believe Equals will be an important source for us in getting updated about other projects carried out and studies being done in the field of gender, education and development.

Esin Aksay  
Education Reform Initiative, Istanbul Policy  
Centre,  
Sabanci Univeristy, Turkey

## 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:

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# Forthcoming events

Until November 2006	UNESCO 60th anniversary	Each week will have a theme, with 16 weeks devoted to education. See <a href="http://www.unesco.org">www.unesco.org</a>
27 November – 1st December	The 7th World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE)	For more details, see <a href="http://www.wipce2005.com">www.wipce2005.com</a>
26-27 November	UNGEI Consultation on Girls' Education and Female Adult Literacy. Beijing, China	For more details, see <a href="http://www.ungei.org">www.ungei.org</a>
28-30 November	Fifth meeting of the High-Level Group on EFA. Beijing, China	For more details contact <a href="mailto:abh.singh@unesco.org">abh.singh@unesco.org</a>
1 December	World AIDS Day	For more details, see <a href="http://www.worldaidsday.org">www.worldaidsday.org</a>
5-9 December	International Conference on HIV/AIDS and STIs in Africa. Abuja, Nigeria	
10 December	Make Poverty History White Band Day III	For more details see <a href="http://www.whiteband.org">www.whiteband.org</a>
Mid-December	Launch of Beyond Access 'Learning For Action Notes'	For more details see <a href="http://www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/beyondaccess">www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/beyondaccess</a>
13–18 December	Sixth WTO Ministerial Conference. Hong Kong, China	For more details see <a href="http://www.wto.org">www.wto.org</a>

## Contact Details

- To contribute to achieving MDG3 – 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 note our updated contact details below. We welcome any comments or**

### enquiries to:

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With additional documents available at  
[www.ungei.org](http://www.ungei.org) (Beyond Access link)

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