

Education and Training of Women

I. Global commitments

The *Beijing Platform for Action* called on Governments to eliminate disparities between women and men in both access to education and educational outcomes. This concerns all levels and forms of education, including basic and primary education, secondary and advanced studies, vocational and labour market training, adult literacy and lifelong learning. The *Beijing Platform for Action* set out six strategic objectives.

- ▶ Ensure equal access to education;
- ▶ Eradicate illiteracy among women;
- ▶ Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education;
- ▶ Develop non-discriminatory education and training;
- ▶ Allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms; and
- ▶ Promote lifelong education and training for girls and women.

The *Beijing Platform for Action* commitments should be seen in the context of the 1990 World Conference on Education for All, at which the international community set the challenge of achieving universal primary education by the year 2000. High on the Education for All agenda was improved access to quality education for girls and women, including the removal of obstacles to participation and the elimination of gender stereotyping in education. Progress was reviewed mid-decade and the Amman Affirmation of 1995 stated that: “the priority of priorities must continue to be the education of women and girls.”

In 2000, the World Education Forum in Dakar reviewed achievements and again set time-specific goals, known as the *Education for All* goals. Two of the six goals of the Dakar Framework of Action focus specifically on achieving gender equality in education:

- ▶ Goal 2: Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
- ▶ Goal 5: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.¹

The outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century” called for policies that guarantee equal access to education and the elimination of gender disparities in education, including vocational training, science and technology, and ensure quality education and improved enrolment and retention rates. It also called for accelerated action to meet the specific targets set out in the *Beijing Platform for Action* as well as highlighted the need to develop a gender-sensitive curriculum at all levels of education to address gender stereotyping as one of the root causes of segregation in working life.²

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) address gender equality and education in two of the eight goals, reflecting widespread agreement that progress in these areas is

critical to poverty reduction and development. MDG2 focuses on universal primary education, and restates the 2015 target for girls and boys alike to complete a full course of primary schooling. One of the specific targets for MDG3 on gender equality and women's empowerment reflects the commitments in both the *Beijing Platform for Action* and *Education for All* to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005.

The Commission on the Status of Women has emphasized the need for continued efforts toward gender equality in education and training. In its agreed conclusions on enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia the fields of education, health and work, adopted at its fiftieth session (2006), the Commission urged governments to ensure women's and girls' full and equal access to all levels of quality education and training, while ensuring progressively and on the basis of equality that primary education was compulsory, accessible and available free to all. In its agreed conclusions on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child adopted at its fifty-first session (2007), the Commission proposed a set of strategic actions to be taken by governments to further progress in the area of education and training. In 2008, at its fifty-second session, the Commission reiterated the need to ensure women's and girls' right to education at all levels in its agreed conclusions on financing for gender equality and the empowerment for women.³

States parties to the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* have obligations to "take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education" (Article 10). There are thus legal as well as political commitments to gender equality in education and training.

II. Progress in implementation at national level

The two most notable areas of progress since 1995 are increased access to education for girls and increased resources and momentum for action for reducing gender disparities in education. There has also been some more limited improvement on the other strategic objectives.

Access to education

Access to education has improved for girls at all levels of education, but particularly at the primary level.

Primary education

Girls have gained both greater access to and greater participation in primary education. According to UNESCO's *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008*, over two-thirds of the 175 countries for which data was available, or 118 countries, had achieved gender parity in their intake of first graders by 2005. The ratio of girl to boy first graders increased globally from 0.91 in 1999 to 0.94 in 2005. At the regional level, South and West Asia, which had the

worst situation in 1999, witnessed the greatest improvement as its ratio rose from 0.83 to 0.92. Countries noted for their progress include Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, India, Nepal, the Niger and Yemen.⁴

Girls' participation in primary education as a whole has also increased. Enrolment in primary education rose from 92 girls per 100 boys in 1999 to 95 girls per 100 boys in 2005. South and West Asia, again, saw the steepest improvement, going from 82 to 93 girls per 100 boys between 1999 and 2005. By 2005, 118 countries out of 188 with available data had achieved gender parity in primary education. A number of countries which had not reached gender parity nevertheless made notable progress. These include Afghanistan, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Guinea, India, Morocco, Nepal and Yemen.⁵

Promoting girls' access to education in Benin

Benin took a number of measures to increase girls' participation in primary education, including:

- Eliminating tuition fees for girls in rural areas and compensating schools for the loss of income through provision of equipment and school furniture, and through building larger schools that can admit more students;
- Organizing awareness-raising campaigns to encourage parents to send girls to and to keep them in schools;
- Rewarding the best girl students with prizes;
- Promoting girls' school attendance through a variety of means, for instance through establishing boarding schools for the most deserving girls in the largest towns of each *département*.

Source: Combined initial, second and third periodic reports of Benin to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2002).⁶

Globally, the survival rate to the last grade of primary education was nearly the same for girls and boys, at 86 per cent and 87 per cent in 2004. However, while 70 countries had achieved gender parity in survival rates, another 53 witnessed substantial disparities, more often in favour of girls than boys.⁷

The number of children not attending school dropped from 96 million in 1999 to 72 million in 2005. While girls still predominate among out-of-school children, their share has fallen slightly from 59 per cent in 1999 to 57 per cent in 2005.⁸

Secondary education

Gender disparity at the secondary level narrowed in two-thirds of the 144 countries for which data was available between 1999 and 2005. There were 94 girls per 100 boys enrolled in secondary education in 2005, compared to 91 girls in 1999. Progress has, however, been uneven across regions. In countries where disparity prevailed, the imbalance was roughly as often in favour of girls as it was in favour of boys. Progress in girls'

enrolment rates was particularly noteworthy in the following countries: Benin, Cambodia, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Nepal, Togo, Uganda and Yemen.⁹

Bangladesh's female secondary school assistance programme

In Bangladesh, girls' enrolments in secondary school were low (below 30 per cent in 1990) and only about one-third of students enrolled in secondary school were girls. Students had to pay tuition fees to attend secondary school and cover costs of books, uniforms, examination fees, school supplies and transport. Under the stipend programme, the government decided to cover tuition fees, examination costs, books, uniforms and transport costs for girls in rural areas in secondary school (grades 6–10) if they attended at least 75 per cent of school days, earn acceptable grades and do not marry. The government provides the funds to girls in local bank accounts, which helps improve the standing of girls in their communities. During the first five years in pilot areas, girls' enrolments rose from 27 to 44 per cent, almost double the national average. The programme was initially implemented in about a quarter of rural districts and proved so popular that in 1994 the Bangladesh government eliminated girls' tuition fees and extended the stipend programme to all rural areas, nationwide. Girls' and boys' enrolments climbed to over 60 per cent, but girls' enrolments climbed faster than boys', and the gender gap shifted to favour girls slightly. By 1998 over 800,000 girls were receiving stipends. Recent research, controlling for other influences, shows that providing the stipend programme for an additional year boosts girls' enrolments by 8–12 per cent. More girls are going on to college and marrying later.

Source: Herz (2006). *Educating Girls in South Asia, Promising Approaches*.¹⁰

Tertiary education

Women have also gained greater access to tertiary education. While in 1999 there were 96 women per 100 men enrolled in higher education institutions, by 2005 women had outnumbered men, bringing the proportion to 105 women per 100 men. While wide disparities remain between regions, the ratio of enrolled women to men increased in all regions but Sub-Saharan Africa during this time period. The increase was particularly notable in the following countries: Azerbaijan, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malawi, Mauritius, Swaziland, Switzerland, Tunisia, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Yemen.¹¹

Illiteracy

While slow and uneven, there has nevertheless been some progress in women's access to literacy. Globally, the adult female literacy rate increased from 70 per cent of women in 1985-1994 to 77 per cent in 1995-2005. UNESCO expects it to further rise to 83 per cent in 2015. The greatest improvements were seen in the Arab States, in East Asia and the Pacific, and in South and West Asia. The literacy rate of young women (aged 15 to 25) has followed a similar progression, rising from 79 to 89 per cent of young women between 1985-1994 and 1995-2005. It is expected to reach 90 per cent in 2015.¹² Moreover, the gender disparity in adult literacy has narrowed: there were 89 literate women per 100 literate men in 1995-2004, compared to 85 literate women per 100 literate men during the previous decade.¹³

A number of countries show an emerging trend. In Botswana, El Salvador, Honduras, Jamaica, Lesotho, Liberia, Malta and Nicaragua for example, gender disparities in literacy rates favoured women, especially among young people. Between 1990 and 2000-2004, the number of countries with documented gender disparities favouring young women over young men increased from 15 to 22.¹⁴

Vocational training, science and technology

Limited cross-time data exists on girls' participation in vocational training. However, the available 2005 figures show that girls accounted for 45 per cent of secondary students enrolled in vocational training. The share of girls was comprised between 40 and 53 per cent in all regions, with the exception of South and West Asia where the proportion of girls was 23 per cent.¹⁵

Advancing girls' participation in vocational training in Egypt

Egypt reported that many of its ministries were involved in expanding women's access to vocational training, including the Ministries of Planning, Labor Force and Immigration, Culture, Housing, Health and Population, and Local Development. The Ministry of Local Development, for example, supported the creation of numerous vocational training centers and held a large number of seminars and training programmes, reaching thousands of female trainees and beneficiaries. Another illustration is the Ministry of Planning's Shorouk Programme which provided vocational training courses to women in rural areas. The Government also collaborated with NGOs, and in particular with the General Foundation of NGOs, to give women better access to vocational and technical training.

Source: National Report of Egypt (2004).¹⁶

The lack of data makes it difficult to compare the participation of girls in scientific education across time. According to the available data for 2005, a few countries have reached a rate of 40 per cent or higher of female participation in science and engineering education at the tertiary level. These include Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia in the Arab States, Mongolia in Central Asia, Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia in East Asia and the Pacific, and Argentina in Latin America and the Caribbean.¹⁷

Increasing women's representation in science and technology in Austria

Compared to other countries of the European Union, the proportion of women in technical sectors remains low in Austria. A joint initiative of four Austrian Ministries - FORTE (Women in Research and Technology) - aims to tackle this challenge and to promote women's access to scientific and technical fields. It was launched in 2002, co-financed by the European Social Fund, and includes the following objectives:

- The Federal Ministry of Science and Research aims to increase the percentage of female professors within universities, which at 15 per cent lies far below the 55 per cent of female first-year students, through measures such as mentoring, promotion of female PhD students, and support to application processes for EU research funding.
- The Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth provides information and research on women in research and innovation, and is in the process of establishing

women-led research centres for applied research, the Laura Bassi Centres of Expertise, to promote the work of female researchers.

- The Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology provides grants and funding to companies and research centres that want to attract more female technicians and scientists. It also promotes cooperation between universities and companies that encourage young female scientists, and provides grants for projects that focus on gender issues.
- The Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture encourages girls to consider technical and natural science related education and occupations through counselling activities.

Source: Austrian Government websites (2009)¹⁸

Non-discriminatory education and training

Little information is available on the extent to which gender stereotypes and discrimination have been removed from school curricula and textbooks. However, some countries report taking steps to promote non-discriminatory education. For example, in Bolivia, research on gender equality was strengthened and courses on gender equality issues were included in the formal curriculum. In Greece, initiatives were taken to train teachers on gender equality and relations between women and men, and to develop teaching materials on gender equality. In Lebanon, curricula were scrutinized to remove information that undermined women's rights or promoted stereotyped images of women.¹⁹ Japan identified combating gender stereotypes in society and education as one of the goals of its Fundamental Plan on Joint Participation by Men and Women. Ethiopia sensitized teachers and academics to gender equality and provided gender-sensitive materials.²⁰

Efforts to eliminate gender discrimination in education in the Dominican Republic

In the Dominican Republic the General Education Act (No. 66-97, article 4), states that gender discrimination is a hinder to the enjoyment of every human being's right to education. The State Secretariat of Education includes an office called EDUC-MUJER that aims to incorporate the principle of gender equality into Dominican education. Steps already under way include:

- › Promoting the use of non-sexist language by education staff and in textbooks, educational materials and the names of parents' associations;
- › Disaggregating educational statistics by sex for most indicators;
- › Making curricula and textbooks gender-sensitive for the basic and intermediate levels of eight curriculum streams;
- › Establishing gender-sensitive teaching techniques at the regional level;
- › Defining gender-based competencies at the basic and intermediate level for each area, level and grade; and
- › Mainstreaming gender equality into the 2003–2012 strategic education development plan.

Further goals for the short and medium term include:

- › Gender-awareness training for all education-sector personnel;
- › Inclusion of gender guidelines in each administration's strategic plan, in line with the

commitments made by the Dominican Republic at the World Conference on Education for All in Dakar in 2000; and

- ▶ Systematically (and by consensus) incorporating recommendations for achievement of an education system free of gender bias in the curriculum and in the textbooks of the various levels, grades and areas.

Source: National Report of Dominican Republic (2004).²¹

Funding and monitoring

National expenditure

Both *Education for All* and the MDGs have focused considerable attention on girls' education, and spurred a momentum for action. The MDG target for eliminating gender disparities in education was the only one specified for the early date of 2005, reflecting widespread agreement about the urgency of addressing the gender gap for the overall achievement of the MDGs. The goal was not met in 2005. There is a large body of evidence on the benefits of educating girls, including the links to improving productivity, lowering infant and maternal mortality, improving nutrition and health, and countering the spread of HIV/AIDS.²²

While little data exists on national education spending directly benefiting girls, figures are available for public expenditure on education as a whole. Globally, the total public expenditure on education as a percentage of GNP increased from 4.5 per cent in 1999 to 4.9 per cent in 2005. In 26 developing countries, the share of public expenditure on education was six per cent or more of GNP in 2005. These countries include Botswana, Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland in Sub-Saharan Africa; Djibouti, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia in the Arab States; Fiji, Marshall Islands, Malaysia and Vanuatu in East Asia and the Pacific; Maldives in South and West Asia; Barbados, Bolivia, Grenada, Guyana, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in Latin America and the Caribbean; and Belarus, Slovenia and Ukraine in Central and Eastern Europe.²³

While the share of public expenditure on education in total government expenditure is considered a better measure of the level of priority assigned to education, only limited data exists. Of the 107 countries for which information was available in 2005, the following countries allocated at least 20 per cent of government expenditure to education: Djibouti, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates in the Arab States; Botswana, Cape Verde, Kenya, Lesotho and Madagascar in Sub-Saharan Africa; and the Islamic Republic of Iran, Malaysia, Mexico, the Republic of Moldova and Thailand in other regions.

Official development assistance

External aid directed to education has increased. Between 1999 and 2005, total aid to education grew from US\$7.3 billion to US\$8.3 billion (with a constant rise between 1999 and 2004, and a fall in 2005), and aid directed specifically to basic education increased from US\$2.8 billion to US\$3.7 billion. The share of education in sector-allocable ODA

remained virtually constant, at 12.7 per cent across all developing countries in 2004-2005, but with disparities by income level: between 1999-2000 and 2004-2005, the share of education grew from 14.2 per cent to 14.9 per cent for all low-income countries, and from 14 to 16 per cent for the least developed countries.²⁴

Among the members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD-DAC) that report on the gender equality focus of their ODA, 23 per cent of their sector-allocable ODA focused on gender equality in 2005-2006 was directed to education, making it the sector that received the largest share of gender-focused, sector-allocable aid. In comparison, this group of donors assigned 15 per cent of its total sector-allocable ODA to education.²⁵ These percentages are comparable to those available for the period 2001-2005.²⁶ It appears, however, that education gained in importance in 2006, representing 19.1 per cent of sector-allocable aid and reaching 26.6 per cent of gender-focused, sector-allocable aid.²⁷

Among the foreign aid instruments, there is some evidence that debt relief positively impacts education expenditure at the national level. Debt relief not only freed up funds for poverty-reduction measures, but also spurred Governments to increase pro-poor expenditure beyond the amounts reassigned from debt servicing.²⁸ While no breakdown by sector is available, it is likely that education, being central to poverty reduction, benefited from this increase in expenditure.

A number of global partnerships have been set up to accelerate progress. The Education for All Global Action Plan, led by UNESCO, aims to coordinate the action of UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank.²⁹ The Education for All Fast-Track Initiative, a global partnership of developing countries and donors, was launched in 2002 to foster more rapid progress by strengthening national education policies and mobilizing resources toward the achievement of universal primary education. It is coordinated by the World Bank and has 35 participating developing countries, 16 of which are in Africa.³⁰ The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), launched in 2000, is led by UNICEF and promotes girls' education through advocacy and technical support at the national level.³¹ In September 2008, Education for All: Class of 2015 was launched. This new initiative is a joint effort by multiple stakeholders to accelerate progress on the globally agreed education goals.³²

Other partnerships focus on literacy. For instance, the UNESCO-led Literacy Initiative for Empowerment, a multi-stakeholder partnership, is being set up in 35 countries that contain 85 per cent of the world's illiterate population. It will provide technical support at the country level in the areas of policy, advocacy, partnership building, capacity-building and innovations, with a particular focus on women, girls, and poor families, particularly in rural areas.³³

Monitoring and evaluation

Both EFA and the MDGs have created a strong impetus for monitoring progress on the elimination of gender disparities and the achievement of gender equality in education. While the availability of data varies by indicator, there has been an evident progression in the collection of up-to-date sex-disaggregated data on education. For example, between

1995/1996 and 2001/2002, 155 out of 204 countries or areas, representing 92 per cent of the world population, frequently reported primary enrolment data disaggregated by sex, and 187 countries or areas did so at least once during that time period.³⁴ The survival rate to the last grade of primary school provides another illustration: while in 1999, sex-disaggregated data was available for only 89 countries, by 2005 it existed for 123 countries out of 203.³⁵

Efforts are also being made to collect detailed statistics on literacy, for example with the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP), developed by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in partnership with other international agencies and technical experts. LAMP aims to provide detailed data on literacy and numeracy skills through a combination of household survey methods and educational assessments, taking into account local socio-cultural and linguistic contexts. It is being tested in El Salvador, Kenya, Mongolia, Morocco, Niger and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.³⁶

To tackle the challenge of obtaining data on non formal education, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics has developed a methodology and database - the Non-Formal Education Management Information System (NFE-MIS). This methodology has been used in Tanzania, India and Cambodia since 2001, Morocco, Jordan and Niger since 2005, and Bangladesh, Niger and Senegal since 2006.³⁷

In connection with the global partnerships and the monitoring process for the *Education for All* goals and the MDGs, there has been considerable investment in reviewing and analysing “what works” and ways of building on the successes of small-scale initiatives to achieve broader systemic changes, thus strengthening the knowledge base for further policy development.³⁸

Lifelong education and training

The lack of existing data makes it difficult to assess whether women enjoy greater educational opportunities across the life-cycle, outside of primary, secondary and tertiary education, than they once did. The available figures demonstrate that relatively few children participate in pre-primary education. Globally, the proportion of children enrolled in pre-school however increased from 33 per cent in 1999 to 40 per cent in 2005, and the gender ratio was 97 girls per 100 boys. Significant progress occurred in the Arab States, where the ratio grew from 77 girls per 100 boys to 88 girls per 100 boys during that time period.³⁹

Non formal education and training opportunities available to women are diverse, but both the offer and the need for such courses are insufficiently documented to draw conclusions on progress. Non formal education programmes are provided by multiple institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, and offer a variety of courses, for instance on literacy, life skills or rural development. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is an increasingly used resource. India, for instance, launched an education satellite, EDUSAT, to increase access to all of quality education and life skills.⁴⁰

III. Remaining gaps and challenges

While progress has been made towards the elimination of gender disparities in education and training, gains have been slow and uneven. Despite overall enrolment increases, disparities in school participation persist between regions, provinces or states and between urban and rural areas. Poor, indigenous and children with disability are also at a systematic disadvantage, as are those living in slums. In addition, poor education quality is emerging as a major concern.⁴¹ Achievement of gender parity has proven to be relatively more easy to achieve than the broader goal of gender equality in education.

Access to education

While there has been significant progress for girls in primary and secondary school participation globally, there remain disparities between regions and between countries. Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania, in particular, display the widest gender gaps in primary enrolment to the disadvantage of girls.⁴² Girls' participation in secondary education remains low in Sub-Saharan Africa and in South and West Asia.⁴³

Worldwide, 40 million girls – about 55 per cent of all children of primary school age – did not attend or dropped out of primary school in 2006.⁴⁴ A large number of these girls come from excluded groups, for instance ethnic, religious, linguistic, or racial minorities.⁴⁵

Including girls from excluded groups

Over the past decade, a range of programmes have helped close the education gap between boys and girls among disadvantaged communities.

- In Chile, ten years of programmes providing additional support to improve the quality of the lowest-performing schools significantly reduced the gaps in learning achievement between indigenous and non-indigenous students, including girls.
- In Brazil, Turkey, Bolivia and India, preschool programmes that involved both mothers and children from excluded groups have been effective in reducing children's subsequent primary school dropout rate and in boosting their achievement.
- In India, community schools that used paraprofessional teachers, allowed the community to select and supervise teachers and hired part-time workers to escort girls from excluded groups to school, had higher enrollment, attendance and test scores compared with students in public schools.

Source: Lewis and Lockheed (2007). CGD Brief: Inexcusable Absence: Why 60 million girls still aren't in school and what to do about it.⁴⁶

It is estimated that 35 fragile states accounted for 37 per cent of all out-of-school children in 2005. Providing places in primary schools for these children will be particularly difficult.⁴⁷ Crowded and dilapidated classrooms, too few textbooks and insufficient instructional time are widespread problems. In countries affected by armed conflict, schools have been targeted. In Iraq more than 2,700 schools were looted, damaged or burned in 2003. Education infrastructure has been extensively damaged in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Kosovo, Mozambique and Timor-Leste. In Liberia, an estimated 23 per cent of all

primary schools were destroyed between 2001 and 2003. In Afghanistan, the burning and bombing of schools and killing of teachers and students severely affected education in some provinces.⁴⁸ Girls face specific challenges to their access to education in emergencies and situations of armed conflict. They may be forced to care for younger siblings while mothers undertook survival and livelihood activities, or may not be allowed to go to school because of fear of rape, abduction and sexual exploitation.⁴⁹

Households in rural or remote communities tend to be poorer and more socially marginalized, with less access to quality basic education. In the developing world, rural women have lower levels of education than urban women, with a disparity of over three years of education in a number of regions.⁵⁰ The remote location of some communities and, in some cases, inadequate salaries and benefits make attracting and retaining teaching professionals difficult and can result in lower quality education. An estimated 18 million new teachers will need to be trained and recruited by 2015.⁵¹ The 'urban advantage' does not work for all children, particularly those growing up in urban slums. In several countries, including Brazil, Guatemala, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, enrolment ratios have decreased in slum areas.⁵²

Retention of girls in schools

Retention of girls in primary and secondary schools remains a challenge. Several countries related the challenge of keeping girls in school to their domestic responsibilities, such as care for siblings, cooking and other household or community chores. Other factors contributing to school drop-outs include: early pregnancy, early marriage, the costs of schooling in terms of fees, uniforms and books, and poor school facilities and inadequate sanitation.⁵³ Young girls, particularly after puberty, are less likely to attend classes if the school lacks suitable hygiene facilities. One study contends that half the girls in Sub-Saharan Africa who drop out of primary school do so because of poor water and sanitation.⁵⁴ Policies that prohibit pregnant or married adolescent girls from attending school further reduce girls' opportunities. In Western and Central Africa, where high repetition and low retention rates are common, drought, food shortages, armed conflict, poverty, lack of birth registration, child labour, and HIV and AIDS contribute to low school enrolment and high dropout rates for both boys and girls, but prove to be especially devastating for girls.⁵⁵

Safety and security

Safe school environments and personal security on the way to and from schools are significant concerns in many countries. For example, a study investigating the nature and extent of abuse in schools in Sub-Saharan Africa found that sexual abuse of girls by both male students and teachers was widespread and in effect condoned by education authorities reluctant to prosecute perpetrators.⁵⁶ Sexual abuse of girls in schools reflects inequality and gender-based violence in the larger society but is also perpetuated when abusive behaviour, particularly by teachers, is not checked. This gives the message that abusive behaviour is socially acceptable. Adolescent peer group cultures were also found to lead to behaviours by both girls and boys that put girls at risk of sexual abuse.

Gender stereotypes

As emphasized in the *Education for All* commitments, the *Beijing Platform for Action* and CEDAW, it is important to broaden the focus beyond access to include issues of quality of teaching and learning. Textbooks, curricula and teacher attitudes continue to reinforce stereotypes on gender roles in society.⁵⁷ Content analysis of textbooks indicate gender bias against girls and women regardless of the level of education, subject matter, country or region. Girls and women are systematically under-represented in textbooks and still shown in highly stereotyped roles. A 2002 review of social studies texts in China showed that 100 per cent of scientists and soldiers portrayed were male and 100 per cent of teachers and 75 per cent of service personnel were female. A study of mathematics books in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo and Tunisia found the proportion of female characters in material to be below 30 per cent in each country.⁵⁸

At the secondary level, gender stereotypes are reinforced by the persistence of practices and attitudes that result in girls and boys taking subjects deemed “appropriate” to either sex, so that, for example, there are more boys in math and science and more girls in literature and language classes.⁵⁹ At the tertiary level, women remain under-represented in certain academic fields. In most countries with data, women account for less than one-third of students in scientific subjects but over two thirds in the humanities, social sciences and health related fields. The absence of female academic staff in some university faculties such as engineering and information technology, especially at career and senior levels, may also be a discouragement to female students.⁶⁰ It is estimated that women constitute only slightly more than one-quarter of the world's researchers, although there are many countries for which data is lacking.⁶¹ In all OECD countries, except Italy, more men than women earn advanced research qualifications.⁶²

Ideas about appropriate work for women continue to influence the allocation of vocational training opportunities and opportunities for retraining. For example, in North Africa there is reportedly a need to expand ideas about appropriate areas for women beyond the traditional crafts that remain a focus of training for young women. In East Africa, women do not have easy access to information about the labour market and training opportunities. In the Pacific islands, non-formal and vocational education favours males, while training for women often takes the form of cooking and sewing classes.⁶³

Moreover, increased participation in education has not necessarily been translated into increased access to the labour market or to better-paying jobs for women. In several countries in which women have higher education levels than men, such as Mongolia, higher education is not reflected in higher incomes. In countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, discriminatory practices by employers add to the constraints to women's access to retraining.⁶⁴

Illiteracy and non formal education

Women and girls, particularly those who are drop-outs and live in poverty, also need to have access to non-formal education, such as adult literacy classes and livelihood skills programmes to improve their livelihoods and enable them to participate in decision-making. However, the issue of illiteracy continues to receive minimal political attention and

donor support.⁶⁵ It is estimated that 72 out of 101 countries will not succeed in halving their adult literacy rates by 2015.⁶⁶ Adult literacy rates have remained well below the world average in South and West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (about 60 per cent), as well as in the Arab States and the Caribbean (about 70 per cent).⁶⁷

Improving data systems in support of policy development

Educational access and attainment statistics do not illustrate other gender constraints in education, such as the tendency for girls to choose study courses with fewer career possibilities.⁶⁸ This requires further breakdown of data.

The review of trends in national data availability by the UN Secretariat's Statistics Division, *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics*, suggested a number of areas where improvements were required for effective monitoring of progress on the MDGs and the *Beijing Platform for Action*.⁶⁹ These included collection of the following data as a matter of routine (rather than through occasional or special studies):

- ▶ enrolment by level of education, sex and age;
- ▶ enrolment in secondary education by sex and type of programme;
- ▶ enrolment in tertiary education by sex and field of study; and
- ▶ number of teachers by sex at each level of education.

The World's Women also noted the need to complement work on improving basic education statistics, such as those above, with work on concepts and statistical standards related to less easily quantifiable issues such as literacy, educational attainment and education quality that are also important to policy development.

Mainstreaming gender equality perspectives in educational planning

There is a considerable body of resources and strategies on achieving gender equality in education, these are not fully reflected in education approaches. A review of 32 national education plans issued between 2001 and 2005, most of which covered ten-year periods, found that all had strategies related to universal primary education, 27 had strategies on improvements to quality (such as better teacher training), and only 18 specified measures to address the *Education for All* gender equality goals.⁷⁰ The need for further attention in the education sector to gender analysis and to training and capacity building to address gender inequalities in education has been noted.⁷¹

IV. Resources

Selected internet sites

- ▶ UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization): www.unesco.org/education (accessed 24 March 2009). UNESCO, the UN's specialized agency for education, provides extensive resources on gender and education, including on literacy.
- ▶ UNGEI (United Nations Girls' Education Initiative): www.ungei.org/ (accessed 24 March 2009). UNGEI aims to galvanize efforts toward achieving the education goals of the MDGs through partnerships that include the United Nations system, national governments, donor countries, civil society, and local communities. Also on this site see the UNGEI GAP Project (Gender Achievements and Prospects in Education), a

multimedia status report on achievements, challenges and new directions in girls' education: www.ungei.org/gap/. The listing of on-line resources at: www.ungei.org/resources/index.html is regularly updated.

Selected reports and tools

- ▶ EFA Global Monitoring Reports: www.efareport.unesco.org/ (accessed 24 March 2009). This UNESCO website gives access to the current and previous reports on progress toward the EFA goals and related resources. Each report includes an update on progress toward gender equality in education.
- ▶ UNESCO (2005). *'Scaling up' Good Practices in Girls' Education*. This report "presents a wide range of successful examples of small-scale interventions in girls' education and also highlights the preconditions for taking such experiences to scale." It includes references to the wealth of material produced in the lead up to 2005 MDG targets, particularly on "what works" to expand access and participation of girls. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001422/142240e.pdf> (accessed 24 March 2009)
- ▶ UNESCO (2004). *'GENIA Toolkit for Promoting Gender Equality in Education.'* This toolkit, designed to help education planners incorporate gender equality into their work, includes Classroom Observation Tools and a Gender Lens for Community Learning Centers (CLC). <http://www.unescobkk.org/index.php?id=4634GENIA> (accessed 24 March 2009)
- ▶ UN Millennium Project (2005). *Toward Universal Primary Education: Investments, Incentives, and Institutions*. Task Force on Education and Gender Equality. This report focuses on MDG 2 (universal primary education); it analyses progress and proposes interventions, including specific attention to gender parity. www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/tf_education.htm (accessed 24 March 2009)
- ▶ UN Millennium Project (2005). *Taking Action: achieving gender equality and empowering women*. Task Force on Education and Gender Equality. This report outlines seven key strategies for achieving MDG 3 (gender equality and the empowerment of women), including post-primary education for girls. www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/tf_gender.htm (accessed 24 March 2009)

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