

**Evaluation of the African Girls Education Initiative  
Country Case Study: Eritrea**

**David W. Chapman  
Janne Lexow  
Saba Issayas**

**May 2003**

**Overview of Key Findings**

- UNICEF AGEI activities are relatively modest in breadth, but appear to have an impact disproportionate to the size of the investment.
- There is wide agreement across government and development partners about the main factors constraining girls' participation in schooling. There also is wide agreement among government and development partners as to the most promising interventions. This wide consensus about both the problems and potential solutions is seen by government as a reflection of the leadership and coordination the Ministry of Education has offered in encouraging the education of girls.
- The MOE does not distinguish AGEI funding from general UNICEF financial support of MOE activities. One consequence is that AGEI has little visibility as a special program within the MOE or with other development partners. Many see this approach as one that promotes sustainability of development strategies, as the MOE develops ownership and as the activities are more likely to continue as individual donors' contributions rise and fall. At the same time, some donors, especially those that depend on fundraising, express concern that it is difficult to link their organizational contribution to specific activities.
- UNICEF-supported strategies to promote girls education in Eritrea are not focused on the same schools. There is no planned overlap of UNICEF constructed schools, teachers who received coaching, incentives for girls. This is viewed by some as a negative feature of the AGEI program who believe that consolidation would result in greater impact on girls, at least in the target schools. Others argue that spreading activities broadly and having at least some activity underway in many schools raised the profile of UNICEF and gives it a stronger claim to participation in broader policy discussions.
- UNICEF education staff argue that money should continue to be specifically earmarked for girls' education. The concern of these staff was that, in the emergency situation caused by war and drought, the pressure to program funds to immediate, life-saving interventions is overwhelming. The continued earmarking of funds for girls' education provided some political protection for this longer-term agenda within an organization trying to address multiple urgent needs.

**Evaluation of the African Girls Education Initiative  
Country Case Study: Eritrea**

**David W. Chapman  
Janne Lexow  
Saba Issayas**

**May 2003**

**Context**

Eritrea faces two overlapping emergencies: the effects of war and drought. There are immense challenges of post-conflict reconstruction and development after the border war with Ethiopia from 1998-2000. Following the "Cessation of Hostilities Agreement" between Eritrea and Ethiopia in June 2000, and the subsequent signing of the Peace Accord in December 2000, a massive repatriation of Eritrean refugees from Sudan began in May 2001. In 2002 alone more than 50,000 people were resettled with the assistance of UNCHR, with an additional 58,000 people planned for resettlement in 2003. The border demarcation with Ethiopia has not yet been finalised and, as a result, about 60,000 people are still internally displaced.

The impact of war and drought on children has been documented in the Preliminary Report of the Eritrea Demographic and Health Survey 2002. This survey indicates that malnutrition levels have exceeded critical levels requiring rapid interventions. The World Food Program currently supplies 80,000 school children in rural remote areas with food, with 32,000 girls receiving an additional dry or take-home ration through the ongoing Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation Program. A large number of schools were destroyed during the war, particularly in the Gash Barka and Debub regions.

*Cultural context:* Eritrea is culturally and linguistically diverse. There are nine major ethnic groups in the country, each with its own language. Whereas the majority of the population (Tigrinya) live permanently settled in the highland areas, Eritrea also has a significant proportion (30%) nomadic people. School enrolment in the nomadic lowland areas is low, especially for girls. Gender balance is more equitable in other areas of the country enrolment, particularly in the lower primary grades. The greatest barrier to the education of girls continues to be the lack of access to schools within a reasonable distance the social and the cultural traditions and beliefs of families. These beliefs assign women a lower social status. Despite strides to improve the status of women through the liberation war and subsequent favourable government policies to address gender equality, attitudes and traditions have been slow to change. The 2003 CRC Committee review of Eritrea's compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) noted that, despite several positive steps forward, there is still widespread societal discrimination against girls and approximately 90% of girls are subject to female genital mutilation (FGM).

*Schooling in Eritrea:* The education system in Eritrea is divided into five levels: Early childhood development (ages 5-6), primary (ages 7-11, grades 1-5), middle (ages 12-13, grades 6-7) secondary (ages 14-17, grades 8-11), and post-secondary. Elementary education is compulsory to all citizens of Eritrea, and includes also adult literacy. The current primary education system contains severe inefficiencies. According to the World Bank Education Sector Note (page 29) only about 45% of students who enter grade 1 complete primary education. On average, it takes nine years to complete the primary cycle, but with great variations among zobas (Ministry of Education, March 2003).

Education is a priority in the Government of Eritrea's (GOE) effort to rebuild and develop the country. Eritrea's EFA goals are ambitious and include: (a) universal primary enrolment; (b) reduction of gender disparity at primary and secondary levels, (c) an 85% transition rate between primary and secondary levels, and (d) a 50% increase in adult literacy (with a special focus on women) by 2015. However, the emergency situation arising from the recent conflict has been a major constraint to the achievement of its EFA goals.

To better achieve the EFA goals, the Ministry of Education is undertaking a "Rapid Transformation of the Education System" (draft, September 2002). This program is still in the formulation period, but it entails reforms aimed at both extending access and strengthening quality. It will address curriculum, school standards, and improved administration. The Government has also embarked on a decentralization process in which the regional levels (zoba) take on increased responsibilities for implementing education programs. Since the administrative capacity of the zobas to fulfil these tasks currently is limited, the MOE is in the process of assessing these capacities and designing training to help school level personnel better fulfil their decentralised responsibilities.

*Teacher development:* As a young country, Eritrea does not yet have the skilled human resources required for expansion of its education system. The MOE recognizes that capacity for training teachers for formal education is severely restricted and that this has been a major barrier to expanding educational access generally and access for girls in particular. To increase the supply of teachers, teacher certification was reduced to a one-year program that students enter upon completion of 11<sup>th</sup> grade. In 2003, the enrolment in pre-service teacher training institutions (e.g., Asmara Teacher Training Institute and Mainefthi) was 700 students, of which 28% are female. Despite lowering the entrance criteria for female students, recruitment of women into the teaching profession remains a major problem.

One reason for the low enrolments is that graduates fear they will be assigned to undesirable teaching posts. The deployment policy for graduated students is the same for nearly all students — graduates are randomly assigned to schools throughout the country based on lottery. Some exceptions are made for married female teachers who can be placed in their home villages and for teachers from some minority groups, who can serve the special language needs of their communities. There is a particular scarcity of female teachers from minority ethnic groups.

To compensate for the shortage of teachers, the GOE assigns large numbers of young adults doing their national service as teachers. At present 2000-3000 people, the majority of whom are women, are drafted into the army and then deployed as teachers. The only teaching qualification for most of them is a two-month crash course prior to their posting. The MOE recognizes that teachers' qualifications need to be raised. One effort to do that, the recently established Pedagogical Resource Centres, are intended to expand the opportunity for in-service teacher training within a cluster school framework. However, they have not yet been put into operation due to lack of material and furniture.

*Donor support.* External funding plays a crucial role in the overall spending on education and training in Eritrea. The majority of funding comes from 10 donors with DANIDA as the major funding agency, providing 33.1% of the total donor contribution (2000). UNICEF, which provide 10% of the total education budget, is third. However, the GOE generally recognizes that lack of donor coordination has led to unbalanced and fragmented development within the sector.

The GOE has requested World Bank support for an Education Sector Improvement Project (ESIP). Key objectives are (a) to expand access to good quality basic education for all children (especially marginalized children) and (b) to improve government's capacity to plan and manage long term sector development (The Government of Eritrea Education Sector Improvement Project, 2003). The ESIP will be supported with an IDA loan of US\$45 million. The sector-wide program is expected to encompass major reforms in terms of both access and quality of the entire education system, with the exception of tertiary education which is not included in the program. The sector-wide program is closely aligned with the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Program (IPRSP) which the GOE plans to launch early July 2003.

The goal of the MOE is to achieve full budgetary support through a pooling of funds (basket funding) from participating donors. Potential donors are concerned, however, that the GOE has not published its overall national budget or expenditure reports. In the absence of these, some potential development partners may choose not to provide budget or program support to the education sector program. On the other hand, the MOE has emphasized its intention to continue seeking external support for projects and its willingness to accept funding for stand-alone projects, as long as they adhere to the sector-wide program framework.

The specific manner though which UNICEF may continue to support MOE activities has not yet been determined. However, GOE and UNICEF signed a new *Country Program of Cooperation 2002-2006* in early 2002. The UNDAF process, which coordinates funding across UN agencies within a specific country, was initiated this year with the signing of the UNDAF document. The UNDAF process designates UNICEF as the lead agency for girls' education in Eritrea.

### **Girls' Education Policy**

The barriers to girls' education in Eritrea have been identified through several studies conducted in the mid-90s. The most comprehensive study, *Participatory Learning and Action Research of Girls' Education in Lowland Eritrea* (1996, MOE/UNICEF), identified economic, social and cultural barriers and provided recommendations to address them. Many of the recommendations originated from the lowland communities themselves. Based on the findings of these studies, MOE has adopted policies and strategies aimed at eliminating the existing gender gap in education and ensuring full and equal access to quality education for both girls and boys. Policies on girls' education are based on the Eritrean Constitution, the Macro Policy, and the PFDJ National Charter, whose origins date back to the national liberation struggle within which the rights of women to equal participation in economic, political and social affairs of the nation were recognized and promoted. The GSE has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination against Women and adopted the Education for All Millennium Goals.

Policies on education have previously been inclusive of both genders. However, with encouragement from UNICEF, the government has placed special emphasis on girls' education. The MOE has drafted a policy framework and guideline for girls' education, which is currently being refined and may be adopted by end of 2003. Policies already in place (a) promote equal educational opportunities for both genders in terms of access and quality, (b) give priority to previously disadvantaged regions and social groups in terms of access, (c) establish coeducational schools, and (d) favour the selection of female teachers in recruitment, training, and placement. Strategies to achieve these policy objectives include:

## Policy Objectives

### Equal Access

#### • Strategies

- Community Sensitization
- Community Feeder Schools
- Deploying Female Teachers
- Formation and gender training of PTAs
- Girls' hostels in strategic areas
- School Feeding and take-home rations for girls

### Quality of Education

- Ensure gender sensitivity of textbooks and curriculum
- Gender training of all teachers
- Increase availability of textbooks and school supplies

Currently, the GOE and MOE are in the process of drafting a national education policy aimed at the rapid transformation of the educational system in Eritrea. The main thrust of the proposed reforms is to extend access through the construction of more schools, improve the quality of education, and ensure that graduates are equipped with relevant knowledge and skills.

## Summary of AGEI Activities in Eritrea

UNICEF AGEI activities are relatively modest in breadth, but appear to have impact disproportionate to the size of the investment, a point discussed later. Key components include:

**Construction of 25 community feeder schools.** Community feeders schools are schools strategically located in particularly disadvantaged and remote areas of the country. Each school is located in such a way that it draws students from 4-6 nearby communities. Twenty-four of the 25 schools are still in operation; one closed due to the border conflict. These community feeder schools have done much to increase children's access to schooling. Enrolment data already documents the extent to which these community feeder schools have extended access to children who would otherwise be unserved. In 2001, these 24 schools enrolled 7825 students, of which 3350 (42.8%) were girls. This girls' participation rate is slightly higher than the nation-wide rate of 40.6%, but considerably higher than would otherwise be the case in these remote and disadvantaged communities.

PTAs in each of the communities were expected to contribute 10% of the cost of school construction, through contributed labour, materials or direct contributions. This is lower than is often expected in other countries, but appropriate given the emergency situation of Eritrea and the general poverty in many of these communities.

### **Construction of two hostels for rural girls to live in order to attend secondary school.**

The UNICEF support for the construction of two hostels was intended to provide boarding facilities for rural girls who want to continue their education at the secondary level. This was also seen as a long term strategy for increasing female teachers, as one of the current constraints is the lack of qualified secondary school graduates available to enter teacher training.

Hostels, while a logical solution to the limited access of girls to secondary education, have been the least successful aspect of the AGEI program in Eritrea. Construction on the two hostels, started in 1999, was delayed when the contractor joined the army during the hostilities in the late 1990s. When the contractor was again available, the MOE delayed resumption of construction due to financial pressures on government created by the war. The delays and

changing economy have contributed to cost overruns and neither facility is yet complete. Additionally, new concerns have been expressed about the appropriateness of constructing a facility in Massawa, specifically that rural parents from culturally and religiously conservative villages will object to their girls living in a boarding facility located in a city. UNICEF plans are currently to finish construction of one hostel, but to discontinue construction of the hostel in Massawa. While the decision to deemphasize the hostels as an AGEI strategy seems quite appropriate, investment in the construction of these two hostels, to date, has accounted for a substantial percentage of overall AGEI funds in Eritrea.

**Support to MOE incentive programs to encourage girls to education.** The primary objective of the Girls' Incentive Scheme is to ensure that girls at high risk of dropping out of basic education stay in school. The basic principle of the scheme is to reduce key constraints on girls' attendance. A key constraint in rural areas has been the need within families for girls to assist with housework, specifically carrying water and collecting firewood.

Operationally, the incentive is given to the parents who get assistance in cash or in kind in order to offset the opportunity cost of sending their daughter(s) to school. In kind incentives have included the provision of 20 litre jerry cans which allow families to store water. [200 litres]The means that girls can carry water at times that do not conflict with the normal school hours. Other incentives have occasionally included provision of a donkey to carry water and firewood and, in drought areas, extra food rations (within the food assistance program of WFP) for families who send their girls to school. The MOE administers the program. It combines UNICEF funds earmarked for the incentive scheme with funds from government and from other donors. The overall scheme now benefits about 1000 girls.

For the most part, these incentives are low cost and informal indications are that it is having a positive effect. A recent evaluation of the AGEI program in Eritrea reports that initial indications are that the incentives do improve girls' enrolment and retention. However it also indicated that the quantity and quality of the incentive given to the families is too small and may need to be increased (Zerai, 2003). Tracking data on the persistence of girls' receiving incentives has not yet been collected.

**School Feeding Program:** The school feeding program, operated by the UN World Food Program in selected drought areas, represents a special type of incentive program. The WFP, in collaboration with UNICEF, requires schools to enrol girls as a condition of participating in the school feeding program. In some of those schools girls are also given extra rations to take home, as a way of rewarding the family for sending their daughter(s) to school. UNICEF provides water for those schools in which WFP is providing a school feeding program. The feeding program currently serves about 80,000 children. The WFP estimates that girls' enrolment has increased 17% in schools in which there is a feeding program.

While clearly an effective way of combining food relief with girls' education agenda, one concern is the long-term sustainability of the effect when the drought ends and the school feeding program is discontinued. It is hoped that some level of the new behaviour developed during the feeding program (sending girls to school) may persist. However, without the incentive, some reduction in girls' enrolment and persistence rates are anticipated.

**Gender sensitivity training offered to ATTI graduates.** Immediately upon graduation from ATTI, graduates have participated in a two-week workshop aimed at sensitizing these new teachers to gender issues in the classroom. UNICEF funds supported the development of the

training materials and the deliver of this workshop to two cohorts of ATTI graduates. This means that approximately 1100 graduates have participated in this workshop.

Those most directly involved with this training program believe it is an effective strategy for raising awareness about classroom practices that can subtly (or not so subtly) discriminate against girls. Participants consider the implications of such factors as how they distribute textbooks, the rate at which they call on students to recite, and the examples they use to illustrate the lessons. However, no study has yet been conducted to determine if workshop participants actually implement these practices in their classrooms or if their classroom practices are meaningfully different from teachers who have not participated in the workshop.

The initial plan for this gender training sometimes overlooked linkages that, with experience, emerged as important. In particular, ATTI and UNICEF staff determined that the issues addressed in the two-week workshop should be integrated into the regular ATTI curriculum. This curriculum integration activity has been identified as a priority in the coming year.

***Coaching of female ATTI trainees to strengthen their content knowledge in math and English.*** In an effort to increase the number of female teachers, the ATTI has lowered the admissions criteria for female secondary school graduates. While increasing female intake at ATTI, it sometimes puts female ATTI students at a disadvantage. This special coaching program is intended to help bolster the content knowledge of female students who may be starting their teacher preparation with a less solid content background than their classmates. So far, 33 female ATTI trainees from ethnic minority groups have received coaching. Those working most closely with the program are positive about its impact on the participants. However, data on the extent that trainees who receive this coaching actually enter and remain in teaching or their ability as teachers (compared to those without the coaching) has not been collected.

***Provision of textbooks and learning materials:*** UNICEF has worked through the MOE to provide 52,900 textbooks in three regions, 950 desks in three other regions, school supplies for 74,900 children, and 102 water containers to 102 schools in three regions. This element of UNICEF work, in 2002, accounted for 66% of UNICEF expenditures in education. This expenditure is consistent with the substantial research evidence on the positive impact of instructional materials on student learning. This larger instructional provision activity reinforced the AGEI but drew on the larger education budget of the Country Office.

***Community advocacy:*** UNICEF has encouraged continuing community level advocacy aimed at encouraging parents and community members to see the importance of sending girls to school. As a practical matter, community advocacy is channelled through the MOE, where messages get sorted and prioritized. Indeed, there are multiple demands on communities to take local action with respect to food security, HIV/AIDS prevention, education for girls, nutrition, childhood inoculations, etc. The MOE collected the information and messages that it and development partners want delivered at the community level and funnel those messages to the zoba and sub-zoba education officers. It is these education officers who actually conduct community workshops. Ultimately, it is up to these education officers to determine the priority they give to different content, the way they combine the content on different development topics, and how they actually conduct the workshops.

Some observers see this approach as a model of how community advocacy should work, given the multiple conflicting demands on communities to take local action on so many different topics. Others are uncomfortable with not knowing what messages actually get delivered at the

community level. They fear content slippage and distortion might occur as messages cascade down through multiple levels.

UNICEF staff from across sectors observe that (a) community advocacy takes a long time, is slow, and needs to be continuous; and, (b) that advocacy, to be effective, needs to be paired with incentives. In the case of girls' education in Eritrea, the incentives have two uses: (1) to remove practical constraints to girls' education (e.g., providing water tanks) and (2) to provide immediate, valued consequences for sending girls to school. Given the potential value of the Eritrea approach as a model for how community advocacy might operate in other countries, it would be useful to have more information about the accuracy and strength of the messages that arrive at the community level and the overall effectiveness of this approach to community advocacy.

## Key Observations

**Considerable agreement about the problems.** There is wide agreement across government and development partners about the main factors constraining girls' participation in schooling. The main constraints include:

- Family values and beliefs that do not value education for girls. One aspect of this is the concern of some parents about girls having contact with boys (e.g., being in the same classroom).
- The need for girls' labour in the home, particularly to carry water and collect firewood.
- The view of some parents that educating a girl is counterproductive to arranging a good marriage for her.
- Concerns for the girls' welfare when they have to travel long distances to the closest school.

**Considerable agreement on the solutions.** There also is wide agreement among government and development partners as to the most promising interventions. The widest agreement is around the following strategies:

- Build schools closer to students
- Introduce ways of reducing the time girls spend on household chores
- Sensitize teachers to gender issues
- Increase number of female teachers in schools
- Increase output of females from teacher training institutes (TTIs)
- Persuade parents of the value of education
- School feeding programs that requires girls attendance as a condition of continuing

### Box A

#### Getting Development Messages to the Community Level

Among the most frequently cited constraints on education development are (a) attitudes and values of community members that are inconsistent with the content of messages that government and development assistance organizations advocate and (b) community members lack of knowledge about effective practices. Consequently, community level advocacy is one of the main strategies used by the MOE and development agencies to shape local knowledge and practice in desired ways. However, education messages compete with those from many other sectors, e.g., sanitation, immunization, water, nutrition. How do these messages get sorted and prioritized?

In Eritrea, local authorities at three levels of government -- zoba, sub-zoba, and kebab village administration -- are at the core of most advocacy campaigns. Zoba and sub-zoba administrations employ Education Officers who organize and lead community meetings, workshops, seminars, training sessions, and other initiatives at the community level. These meetings both inform the community about government's policies and engage community leaders in identifying socially appropriate, culturally acceptable, and economically feasible local solutions to the problems under discussion. In each case, these education officers work in conjunction with kebab authorities and relevant interests groups. Consequently, these Zoba and sub-zoba staff have an enormous influence over what messages are carried forward to the community and how those messages are actually delivered.

Among the lessons from experience in community advocacy:

- The use of diverse communication channels and an emphasis on interactive communication are important strategies for promoting community engagement.
- Although the kebab and sub-zoba level meetings are important, it is also important to interact directly with citizens at the village-level whose behaviour is ultimately that in which change is sought.
- Advocacy is most effective when it is coupled with incentives.
- The use of multiple strategies over a protracted period of time is often needed to bring about the intended changes in community level attitudes and behaviours.

This wide consensus about both the problems and potential solutions is seen by government as a reflection of the leadership and coordination the Ministry of Education has offered in encouraging the education of girls.

**Low visibility of AGEI.** UNICEF, like many other donors, works through the Ministry of Education. The MOE has programs to build community feeder schools, provide incentives for girls to attend school; produce and distribute textbooks; etc. Many development partners support these efforts by funnelling their money through the MOE, which pools the funds from different donor sources and then distributes these funds to support these school and community level initiatives. The MOE does not distinguish AGEI funding from general UNICEF financial support of MOE activities.

One consequence of this approach is that AGEI has little visibility as a special program within the MOE or with other development partners. Similarly, school and community level recipients may not realize the role any particular development partner is playing in the support of any particular activity. On one level, this approach is very consistent with what UNICEF and many other donors articulate as good development policy. It emphasizes the role of the national government. Many see this approach as one that promotes sustainability of development strategies, as the MOE develops ownership and as the activities are more likely to continue as individual donors' contributions rise and fall. At the same time, some development partners, especially those that depend on fundraising, express concern that it is difficult to link their organizational contribution to specific activities.

**The linkage among AGEI activities within the country.** UNICEF-supported strategies to promote girls education in Eritrea are not focused on the same schools. For example, there is no planned overlap of UNICEF constructed schools, teachers who received coaching, incentives for girls, though such overlap may occur. This is viewed by some as a negative feature of the AGEI program. Senior officials in the Ministry of Education argue that UNICEF activities should be consolidated and focused on a narrower set of schools. They argue that such consolidation would result in greater impact on girls, at least in the target schools.

Some in UNICEF hold a different view. They believe that spreading activities broadly and having at least some activity underway in many schools raised the profile of UNICEF and gives it a stronger claim to participation in broader policy discussions (e.g., a “seat at the table”). While spreading activities may not maximize impact on girls in specific communities, it maximized UNICEF’s access as a participant in the national policy forum which, in the long-term, leads to greater impact. There appears to be support for this argument. UNICEF’s impact on the national agenda in Eritrea concerning girls’ education appears to be considerably greater than can be explained by the direct impact of its specific interventions.

**Exclusiveness of focus on girls.** UNICEF is the only development partner in Eritrea with such a concentrated focus on girls’ education. This is mildly controversial. The concern of some donors is that the emphasis should be on education for all rather than on girls specifically. Virtually all donors of the major development partners in Eritrea recognize the importance of girls’ education, but they argue that they usually address that issue as a subcomponent of a wider set of education priorities and strategies.

Closely connected to the discussion on focus is a mild scepticism expressed by some donors with UNICEF’s emphasis on a rights-based argument in support of girls’ education. They view the rights-based approach as too abstract in the face of parents’ need to see the benefits of educating their daughters. They suggest that the practical benefits of educating girls are well established and should be more clearly the focus of presentations to parents. This view does not necessarily need to be a source of concern for UNICEF. UNICEF has been clear about both its rights-based approach and its focus on girls and these characteristics do much to give UNICEF a distinctive identity among international development assistance organizations. This view, however, may signal the need for advocacy for the UNICEF approach within the donor community itself.

### **A tale of two schools: 200 kilometres and a world apart**

#### **School #1 - “None of our girls are even engaged [to be married]”**

The Firdigi Community Feeder School in Anseba Zoba was constructed in 1998, one of six community feeder schools in the sub-zoba. The three classrooms are used for two shifts. All nine of the teachers are certified and all nine are in the school as part of their national service. Four are female. The population in the area is of the Bilen ethnic minority and Bilen is the language of instruction. School enrolments have grown rapidly, from 173 students in 1998/99 to 308 in 2002/03 (Table 1). The overall net enrolment rate in this zoba is 59%. The drought is perceived by the REO to have more negative effects on school enrolment than socio-cultural factors.

**Table 1: Enrolment Growth in Firdigi Community Feeder School (1998/99-2002/03)**

Year	Male	Female	Total	% Female
1998/99	89	83	173	48.3
99/00	102	93	195	47.7
00/01	108	114	222	51.4
01/02	130	140	270	51.9
02/03	*	155	308	50.3

Grade 1 is the most critical stage in the school cycle and on average it takes 8 years for a child to graduate from the primary cycle. Of the 172 students who started Grade 1 five years ago, only 78 have made it to Grade 5. The nearest Junior Secondary School is 6 km away, but the School Director and Regional Education Officer both expect that about 70% of the students will continue their education after having completed 5<sup>th</sup> Grade.

In the Bilen society girls enjoy comparatively more freedom than in some other parts of the Eritrean society. Parents are willing to send both girls and boys to school. While they are themselves are mostly illiterate, they seem convinced that education may give their children better opportunities than they have themselves.

The school has received exercise books from UNICEF's store in Copenhagen as well as textbooks in the local language. Children receive food under the World Food Program (WFP). The PTA is very active. The school itself was constructed with 10% community contribution only, but the PTA has on its own initiative constructed a separate director's office building without any further assistance from UNICEF/MOE.

When asked about particular evidence for how education could help changing women's lives, both the Director and the REO agreed that employment opportunities and economic improvements in women's lives would be limited in the short-term. They did feel, however, that the four female teachers at the school made a difference as role models for the students, both boys and girls. Both the Director and the REO felt that education for girls had positive impact in terms of postponing their marriage age. They proudly declared that none of their girls were even engaged yet, and that this was a trend that could be observed throughout the communities which had elementary schools established closer to the villages.

**School #2: "Little demand for girls' education".**

The Melka primary school was built in 1992 with funds from the MOE. Girls' participation in education is very low in the Soha community, to which the majority of people belong. The population is semi-nomadic, the environment is harsh and people are poor. The Melka area is a particular drought-prone environment. Most families live as sheep/goat producers. The mode of production is extremely labour-intensive and children are engaged in all sorts of duties from an early age. Socialization practices put girls in a very subservient position, and from an early age they are taught not to express themselves in public or mix with boys.

In general few children are sent to school. After a MOE sensitization campaign in 2000 the school saw an enrolment of 220 children. Out of these 19 were girls but all of them dropped out after a short time. In the school year 2001/02 the student population had dropped to 121 with only four girls. Only 99 children enrolled in 2003, including these same 4 girls: two in Grade 1, and one girl each in Grades 2 and 4. The School Director said that even having one girl making it to Grade 4 was remarkable in the community. He attributed this to the fact that her father was an ex-fighter with an emancipated attitude to girls' education. The girl's father had even bought a donkey for his daughter to ease the travel the 7 km distance from home to school. Children themselves said that it was most common for only one child in the family to be allowed to go to school, because the children's work was needed in the household. When one was sent to school, another child in the family was pulled out. Girls were usually pulled out easier than boys. If an older sister was already in school, she would be immediately pulled out if a younger brother reached school age. Although it was said that cultural traditions put severe restrictions on girls' mobility outside the immediate household sphere, girls nevertheless seem to walk long distances both to fetch water and to herd animals.

There were 7 teachers in the school- all of them on regular MOE salary. None of the teachers were female and it appears to be a general understanding between the REO and the School director that deploying a female teacher in such harsh and difficult environments would be close to inhuman, in particular if she had no family in the community.

UNICEF/MOE have approached the community through an incentive scheme to enhance parents' willingness to send their daughters to school. Taking into consideration that one of the heaviest burdens for girls is fetching water, a few (2) water storage tanks have been given to those households that send their girls to school. The School Director was of the impression that these tanks had been an encouragement to the families and that the 200 litre tanks benefited the whole community. As far as increasing enrolment of girls is concerned, however, the distribution of the water tanks appears to have had little impact. The proportion of girls to boys in school has remained constant over the years, with one girl out of ten boys, with or without this incentive. There was no information available about whether the water tanks had reduced the girls' total burden associated with fetching water or whether it was only the time schedule for fetching it that had changed.

**Disproportionate impact.** UNICEF/Eritrea's impact at the national policy level appears to be greater than would be explained by its programmatic impact. Given the dispersion of its relatively modest programmatic efforts across many regions and schools, specific impacts are likely to be modest.

Its programmatic contribution in building 25 community feeders schools, supporting incentives to encourage girls to attend school, supporting textbook production, offering gender sensitization workshops to ATTI graduates, and coaching to 33 female ATTI trainees is modest, especially given the dispersion of those efforts across multiple sites. The level of UNICEF impact can be

explained, in part, by the good working relationships that UNICEF staff seem to have developed with Ministry of Education officials and UNICEF's clarity of focus on selected development issues.

**Earmarking.** The extent that funds should be earmarked for girls' education, either in the government budget or within the UNICEF budget, is a source of ongoing, low-intensity debate. In the current education sector framework documents, while nothing stated is inconsistent with a specific emphasis on girls' education, it is not specifically mentioned as a priority (Ministry of Education, April 2003). The MOE sees their commitment to girls as integrated into their larger strategy. One reason is that the MOE and many of the donors believe they incorporate a commitment to girls' education in all the programs they run and, as a consequence, girls' education does not require special earmarking.

Within UNICEF itself, the education staff hold a different view. They were clear in their belief that funds should continue to be earmarked for girls' education. The concern of some UNICEF staff was that (a) in the emergency situation caused by war and drought, the pressure to program funds to immediate, life-saving interventions is overwhelming and (b) that this tide could swamp even the most well-intentioned efforts to channel funds into interventions with longer-term payoffs (such as girls' education). The continued earmarking of funds for girls' education provided some political protection for this longer-term agenda within an organization trying to address multiple urgent needs.

**Documentation of success.** Eritrea lacks documentation for AGEI activities that may be quite successful. Indeed, the Eritrea AGEI activities have received a considerable amount of national and international scrutiny. The primary conclusion of an external evaluation of the Eritrea AGEI, conducted in 2003, was that most of the activities now underway should be continued, school construction efforts should be expanded, and more attention should be given to reducing student grade repetition and dropout (Zerai, 2003, p. 5). Nonetheless, UNICEF/Eritrea has been more focused on implementation of activities than documentation of results. If the interventions to promote girls' education in Eritrea offer promising directions for other countries, more systematic data documenting outcomes and impacts will be needed.

**SWAPS and SIPS.** International donors, led by the World Bank, are in conversations with the GOE about moving to sector-wide programming in the education sector (SWAP). However, the SWAP approach in Eritrea differs from other AGEI countries, primarily because it is not policy-based but rather, in the view of the World Bank, more project-based. It is designed so that, once the overall sector wide plan is adopted by government, development partners can choose to help fund activities that are consistent with their organizational priorities.

World Bank is working with the MOE to spearhead the development of a sector-wide strategy in education. The overall MOE framework would cost about \$160 million to implement. At present, the World Bank anticipates providing \$45 million in IDA credits.

## References

Ministry of Education (June 2002). MLA Project 2001, Department of General Education, Asmara, Eritrea.

Zerai, Worku (2003) African Girls' Education Initiative, Eritrea: International Evaluation, Asmara: UNICEF/Eritrea.

Ministry of Education (April 2003). Eritrea Education Sector Improvement Program, Framework 2003/04-2007/08, Asmara, Eritrea.

Ministry of Education (March 2003). Girls' Education Policy and Policy Guidelines in Eritrea (draft), Department of General Education, Asmara, Eritrea.

UNICEF/Eritrea (2003). AGEI Technical Report, 2002, Asmara, Eritrea.

UNICEF (December 2002). Accelerating progress on girls' education, Eastern and Southern Africa Region's Component of the Global Strategy (draft). Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, Nairobi, Kenya.

## People contacted

Sara Abraham	Mercy Corps
Mebrwhtu Alayolar	MOE UNICEF, Director of ATTI
Esaw Araia	MOE, Project Officer
Hailu Asfaha	MOE
Lucien Back	UNICEF-NY
Christian Balslev-Olesen	UNICEF-Eritrea
Jennifer Bitorde	WFP
Marion Bradley	World Bank
Berhane Demoz	MOE-SIP (PMU)
Ely-Salem Elhadj	Head of Program Unit, World Food Program
Florian Fichtl	World Bank, Country Manger
Akberet Fre	Lutheran World Foundation
Yemane Ghebreyesus	UNICEF Project Officer, Education
Mebrahler Giliabi	ATTI
Asmeret Habtemicael	MOE, Director of Supervision
Tesfalem Habtom	National Union of Eritrean Women
Aster Hargot	UNICEF-NY
Arthur Hoyen	Lutheran World Foundation
Mehret Iyob	MOE
Mamadou Mbaye	Deputy Country Director, World Food Program
Simon Mphisa	UNICEF-Eritrea
Sam Mort	Voluntary Service Overseas
Musa Nair	MOE, Director General
Craig Redmond	Mercy Corps
Abraham Russom	MOE, Curriculum Development
Sadia Saleh	UNHCR
Ezra Simon	Mercy Corps
Eliu Winther-Schmidt	MOE/Danida
Abraham Techle	MOE UNICEF, Director of HRD
Tewoleh Tlur	MOE, MTTC
Eyob Tsegay	Vision Eritrea