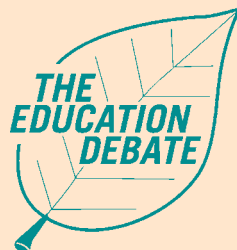




THE MOVE TO PROGRAMME-BASED APPROACHES: AN EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION?

The Experience of Recent Evaluations

Ted Freeman
Goss Gilroy Inc.



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SERIES FOREWORD

There is a growing sense of momentum around education in South Asia. Governments are engaged and a lot has been done. The Millennium Development Goals have added an additional spur to action as indeed have greater awareness on gender disparity and the need for educated workers. There is though a long way to go if the rights of all children are to be realised.

Providing access to education is only part of the story. Once children are enrolled and attending, the quality of their education must make it a worthwhile experience. The special needs of girls in the social and cultural context of South Asia call for special measures, as do the needs of all children in situations of conflict and emergency. South Asia has many rich, positive examples of success in advancing basic education. It is important that these are shared and built on if there is to be an overall improvement throughout the region.

This series of papers aimed at promoting better education in South Asia grew out of collaboration between the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia and the newly formed UN Girls' Education Initiative, and had its genesis at a Regional Meeting on Accelerating Girls' Education in South Asia in February 2005.

Essentially the series is intended to be a forum that allows debate, exchange of ideas and to break new ground. It will aim to capture the momentum and extol good practice to all engaged in educational policy and implementation.

The series does not seek to represent a specific viewpoint, but rather is intended to enable specialist contributors to present issues in greater depth and breadth than is often the case in official documents.

Initially the series will focus on girls' education but it is hoped that eventually it will broaden into a platform for more general education issues related to South Asia, with a particular emphasis on social inclusion. Contributions and feedback are invited from academics and practitioners from throughout the South Asia region and beyond. The series editors are particularly interested in submissions which offer new ideas and strategies that can assist those needing answers, and which can add impetus to the ongoing efforts in the region to provide quality education for all.

Come, join the debate!

INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to examine the lessons learned in a major global evaluation of external support to basic education (Freeman, Faure et al., 2003), supplemented by a recent joint government-donor evaluation of the Basic and Primary Education Programme II (BPEP II) in Nepal (Freeman, Niels et al., 2004), as they relate to the challenge of girls' education. More specifically, it examines the question of how partnership can become an effective strategy in accelerating progress in South Asia toward achievement of the MDGs relating to girls' education.

It begins by examining the nature of the challenge, proceeds to examine how external agencies have tried to support primary and early secondary education in the past and finally examines what evaluations are saying about what does and does not work. In taking a lead from the work done in the Joint Evaluation of External Support to Basic Education which was carried out in 2002-03 and supported by 13 agencies - including UNICEF - and four developing countries, the paper focuses finally on why meaningful partnership is necessary and how it can be achieved.

THE CHALLENGE FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION

The most recent Millennium Development Goals Progress Report (UNMDG, 2005), in reporting on the goals to promote gender equality and empower women, categorizes the situation in Southern Asia with regard to equal girls' enrolment in primary school under the heading **Progress But Lagging**. Even more telling, perhaps, is the finding that in the area of equal girls' enrolment in secondary school there has been **no significant change**.

Turning to UNESCO's efforts to monitor progress toward the same goals, Table 1 presents the Gender Parity Index for Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka regarding the girls' to boys' primary level enrolment ratio for the years 1998 to 2001 (UNESCO, 2003). Table 2 shows similar data for girls' to boys' secondary level enrolment ratios.

TABLE 1 Girls' to boys' primary level enrolment ratio (UNESCO, 2003)

Country	1998	1999	2000	2001
Bangladesh	0.97	0.99	1.01	1.02
India	0.83	0.83	0.83	0.85
Nepal	0.78	0.80	0.85	0.87
Sri Lanka	0.97	–	–	0.99

TABLE 2 Girls' to boys' secondary level enrolment ratio (UNESCO, 2003)

Country	1998	1999	2000	2001
Bangladesh	0.96	1.01	1.05	1.10
India	0.70	0.71	0.71	0.74
Nepal	0.71	0.72	0.73	0.75
Sri Lanka	-	-	-	1.06

While data from 2001 may not be seen as a reliable indicator of outcomes in 2005, the picture is not much more positive when one turns to the latest data available from the 2005 *State of the World's Children* report (UNICEF, 2004) (Table 3).

TABLE 3 Female GER as a percentage of male GER 1998–2003 (UNICEF, 2004)

Countries and Territories	GER: Females as Percentage of Males	
	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
Afghanistan	-	-
Bangladesh	101	109
Bhutan	76	29
India	84	71
Maldives	99	106
Nepal	87	74
Pakistan	74	66
Lanka	99	107
South Asia	86	76
World	93	92

The situation seems most serious with regard to secondary school enrolment where for a number of countries gains in the area of 25-40% will be required by 2015. This would be a difficult enough problem even if there were not serious deficiencies in the reliability of national

level data - deficiencies which are by no means limited to countries in South Asia.

The experiences of both the Joint Evaluation of External Support to Basic Education and the Evaluation of BPEP II in Nepal suggest very strongly that

national statistics are masking very difficult and intransigent problems in achieving gender parity in enrolments in both primary and secondary school - problems which become readily apparent when evaluation teams visit rural schools in difficult to serve districts.

Two important examples may illustrate this problem - one from Latin America and one from South Asia.

BOLIVIA

In Latin America, Bolivia is one of the countries that the 2003/2004 EFA Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2003) deemed likely to achieve gender parity in primary enrolment by 2005. While national level official data supports such a judgement (the ratio of girls to boys in primary school was reported as 0.99 in 2001), field level observations in rural areas showed that, while this may be true for entry into the lowest grades, girls' participation declines very rapidly to the point that boys dominate enrolment by the leaving year. Further, this is a structural feature of schools in rural areas.

A system of satellite schools means that the earliest primary grades (1-4) are accessible for most children within a reasonable walk. However, upper primary and early secondary schools in rural areas are located some distance away and could not, in any case, handle the load if all children in lower primary advanced to upper primary and/or lower secondary. Secondary schools normally require pupils to be resident there. Thus there are designed points of attrition in the system. Given social conditioning and labour practices in rural Bolivia it is no surprise that at each point of attrition (grades 4 and 7) girls fall by the wayside at a much faster rate than boys.

Thus, in much of rural Bolivia, it will be a major surprise for girls and their parents to learn that the country is near to achieving gender parity in primary enrolment. The evidence in front of their eyes will argue otherwise.

NEPAL

In South Asia, Nepal presents a different picture, though not necessarily a positive one. The recent Evaluation of BPEP II in Nepal did indeed record that public primary schools seemed to present rough parity of enrolment between girls and boys, at least in the early grades. On the other hand, the case was very different in private primary schools. These schools (which parents interviewed often felt provided a higher quality education) were very much a preserve of boys. In questioning parents with children in either or both systems, the evaluation team found that many parents felt the public schools did not provide quality schooling and if they were to pay for the perceived higher quality of private schooling then they would send a boy rather than a girl.

These two examples are not statistically grounded, but they were similar to evaluation findings in the five countries studied (Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Nepal, Uganda and Zambia). If the local, district

and school level findings of these evaluations are correct, the challenge of achieving the MDGs for girls' education is perhaps even more difficult than national and global data indicate.

CONSTRAINTS ON GIRLS' ATTENDANCE AND ACHIEVEMENT

A diagnosis of problems in encouraging girls' attendance and achievement in primary and secondary schooling was not the primary focus of either the Joint Evaluation of External Support to Basic Education or the Joint Evaluation of BPEP II. At the same time, the

evaluations did assess external support as a contribution to the achievement of the EFA goals. In carrying out case studies of programmes at a national, regional and district level in five countries, the evaluations provided concrete indications of factors which constrain girls' achievements. These included:

CONSTRAINTS ON GIRLS' EDUCATION

- Under-representation of female teachers
- Poor school physical infrastructure
- Inadequate security
- Isolation
- Costs

- School systems with a disproportionate number of male teachers, and correspondingly significant under-representation of female teachers, especially in the early years - not surprisingly, girls are more apt to stay in school when they are taught by at least a mix of female and male teachers.

- School systems with very poor physical infrastructure with attendant problems of overcrowding, poor air quality, lack of water and sanitation facilities, etc. These seem to have a disproportionate impact on girls' continued attendance.
- Security: Poorly supervised and poorly trained teachers working in inadequate facilities which are poorly lit and working without adequate support from either the ministry and community are not able to provide reasonable physical security for girls who (at least in the eyes of parents) are more vulnerable to violence than boys - sometimes teachers themselves represent a risk factor.
- Isolation: The further girls must travel to attend early primary, late primary or secondary school the less likely some parents are to continue to send them to school, sometimes out of legitimate concern for their security and safety.
- Costs combined with community traditions and with labour practices. For many households and communities, the direct and opportunity costs of sending girls to school is higher than for boys. It

seems from the case studies that school fees, textbook costs and other charges which raise the direct cost of sending a child to school tend to discourage attendance and this affects girls more than boys.

Basically the lessons from the documents reviewed and case studies undertaken for both these evaluations fall into two areas and can be summarized in two statements:

1. **Deficiencies in infrastructure, materials, teaching methods and overall school management** seem to have a stronger effect in deterring girls' attendance and achievement because their specific needs are often sacrificed in an effort to maintain the basic system.
2. **Structural and economic characteristics** of formal public school systems which may discourage attendance for economic reasons (or out of a concern for quality) seem to discourage girls' attendance more than boys. In most countries studied, if parents need to restrict attendance of some children and encourage others due to economic constraints, they often favour boys.

Other studies and evaluations have gone much further than either the Joint Evaluation of Basic Education or the Evaluation of BPEP II in Nepal in analysing the constraints on girls' achievement and on finding methods to accelerate girls' attendance and achievement in primary and secondary education. UNICEF itself has, in *Accelerating Progress in Girls' Education* (UNICEF, 2003, pp. 11-19), identified a set of concrete actions which countries may implement in partnership with supporting agencies. These include:

- Addressing issues relating to HIV/AIDS by making schools a key centre for combating the epidemic;
- Providing quality, community based early childhood care (a task now undertaken by many older girl siblings of school age) to both relieve girls of this unpaid but essential task and encourage families to include time for schooling in the daily routine of all children;
- Using nutrition and health interventions as incentives for enrolment;
- Improving water and sanitation facilities in schools;
- Improving protection from violence or sexual abuse;

- Encouraging employment of female teachers.

These are all practical and necessary initiatives and, in many ways, they are closely aligned with what the global evaluation of External Support to Basic Education found through its review of evaluations of gender equality aspects of education. They also address the negative influences diagnosed in the five country studies featured in the two evaluations which are referred to in this paper.

This still leaves open the question of what strategies are appropriate in developing programmes of cooperation between bilateral and multilateral agencies on one hand, and developing country governments (and civil society) on the other, in order to accelerate girls' education.

UNICEF has quite rightly pointed out that **partnership** in all its dimensions is a key strategy for accelerating progress toward gender equality in education. This key strategy was a major focus of both the Joint Evaluation and the Evaluation of BPEP II since they were largely concerned with the quality of partnership between external agencies and national governments as they attempt to achieve Education For All.

EXTERNAL SUPPORT TO BASIC EDUCATION AND ITS GENDER IMPLICATIONS

In addressing partnership, a key first question is what has been the nature and volume of external support to basic education in recent years.

At a global level, there has been a commitment on the part of both developing and developed countries (shared by multilateral organizations such as UNICEF, the World Bank and UNESCO, to name just three) to commit the resources required to achieve Education For All as expressed in both the EFA Goals and the education related MDGs.

A key question for evaluation was whether the volume and nature of external support to basic education was indicative that OECD countries and

multilateral agencies on their part were following through on their commitment. In other words, were enough resources flowing into basic education from external sources; and where they were provided, were they being used in an effective way.

In answering these questions the Joint Evaluation relied on an extensive review of literature relating to Education For All, profiling of global data on resource flows into basic education from 1990 to 2002, and on the evidence gathered in country case studies of basic education programming in Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Uganda and Zambia. In 2004 this was supplemented by the Evaluation of the Basic and Primary Education Programme II in Nepal, carried out for

the HMG/N and a consortium of donor agencies.

At a global level, the evaluations reported the following important findings regarding the volume and shape of external support to basic education. These findings have important implications for efforts to accelerate progress in girls' education.

Volume of External Support to Basic Education

- The Jomtien and Dakar conferences on Education For All represented watersheds in the history of basic education in that they established clear goals and an agreed-upon process of planning, follow-up and reporting, including commitments to provide the necessary resources.
- Nonetheless, the volume of external support did not increase in the period from Jomtien to Dakar at the rate which the commitments made would suggest. By 2002 there remained a very wide gap between the amount of external assistance needed and that being provided.
- Countries and agencies were still (in 2003) failing to adequately code

and track their contributions to Education For All.

- There have been significant efforts since Dakar in 2000 to increase the flow of external support to basic education but these (including the Fast Track Initiative or FTI) had not as of 2002 resulted in increased disbursements.
- In contrast to the global picture, the four countries in the Joint Evaluation (Burkina Faso, Bolivia, Uganda and Zambia) and Nepal as studied in 2004 were receiving increasing external support in basic education (pre-primary, primary and early secondary).

Form of External Support to Basic Education

- A key feature of recent years (1990-2004) has been an increasing emphasis by external agencies on policy dialogue and the provision of technical assistance (TA). In particular the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF have been very active in providing technical assistance and engaging in policy dialogue. In many ways the role and influence of the World Bank has been increasing

over time. The intensity of policy dialogue has also increased as more and more external support is in the form of programme support or Sector-Wide Approaches (SWAps).

- Technical assistance has tended to shift over time away from education-specific expertise, such as teacher education and curriculum development, and towards programme development and improved management.

Modalities of External Support

- A number of global and national factors have contributed in each of the countries studied to an ongoing narrowing of the focus of external support and national resources to concentrate almost exclusively on Universal Primary Education (UPE) to the detriment of non-formal education, including adult literacy. Where support is provided to these areas, it is often directed through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) with a consequent weakening of the government ministries charged with the responsibility.
- There has been substantial progress towards a programme approach or SWAp in each of the countries studied. Full external agency participation in many cases is limited to a core group of external agencies, with the 'outer' group of supporting agencies including some who work within the overall policy and programme framework and some who do not.
- Some country studies suggest that the host governments have a strong sense of ownership of the resulting programme while others point to the fact that the core group of agencies participating have attempted to harmonize administrative procedures. All point to some improvements in coordination.
- Conditionalities have been a feature of external support to basic education in all of the countries studied. In some they have reflected national priorities and goals while in the others conditionalities appear to have played a role in weakening the national sense of ownership of sectoral programmes in basic education.

One of the most important findings regarding the effect of external support on basic education noted that **the EFA goals relating to gender equality had received less emphasis than some of the others:**

The goal of achieving gender parity in primary and secondary school enrolment is proving more difficult than expanding overall levels of enrolment. It tends to receive less explicit attention in programme planning and implementation. Addressing gender parity is especially difficult where, among other things, the very structure of the primary school system discourages girls' participation.

One reason for addressing the changing form of external support to basic education was to examine whether the move to programme-based approaches (PBAs) and SWAps was contributing to a new, more complete form of partnership in the attempt to achieve Education For All (including gender parity and gender equality). In general terms, the answer to this question was that these movements could potentially contribute to enhanced partnership but they did not seem to be having that effect for a number of reasons. As the evaluations found, it was first necessary to step back and consider the issue of 'Why partnership?'

PARTNERSHIP - WHY IT MATTERS FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION

In theory at least, one could pursue the problem of accelerating progress towards girls' achievements in education in South Asia without being concerned over questions of partnership. If international research (as argued in Section 3 above) has identified effective programme strategies and operational approaches to increasing girls' participation and achievement (and they seem to be applicable across regions, cultures and countries), why not simply make them conditions for receiving external support? In their turn, national governments could, through centralized management structures, impose these solutions on local communities and schools. Problem solved?

Unfortunately, the direct evidence of recent evaluations argues very strongly against either external actors imposing strategies and tactics on their national government partners (and civil society) or national governments imposing similar actions at the community level. Regardless of its morality, imposing solutions from above has been shown to be ineffective in the literature and in the experience of the five countries studied in the two evaluations under discussion.

The evaluations demonstrate fairly conclusively that external support to pre-primary, primary and secondary education was not likely to be effective in accelerating movement toward the

EFA and MDG goals in education unless it paid adequate attention to five key elements in partnership:

- **Continuity** of policy direction, funding, technical and administrative staffing, representation, political will and leadership;
- A relative balance of **administrative and technical capacity**, or at least a sufficiency of capacity on the part of key stakeholders in partner countries, that allows them to 'hold their own' in policy and technical dialogue with external support agencies;
- Effective **participation** by stakeholders so that their interests and needs are reflected in resulting policies and programmes;
- **Relevance and adaptability** of external support and externally

supported basic education to local conditions;

- The use of chosen **aid modalities** in a process that deepens partnership and promotes ownership and avoids the creation of programmes and projects where external agencies are seen as the primary drivers.

Where these factors were present, not only was partnership more meaningful but the resulting programmes were usually more effective. In other words, local ownership really does matter.

The evaluations being presented here attempted to probe these different dimensions of partnership and to see whether recent trends in designing, implementing, and monitoring programmes of support to education tend to strengthen partnership or to weaken it. The most positive way of characterizing the results would be to call them 'mixed'.

PARTNERSHIP - WHAT IS THE TREND?

If one examines the factors critical to effective partnership in education as reported in evaluations the following key findings emerge:

Continuity

- Basic policy continuity on the part of developing countries has been a positive feature of the partnership landscape.
- Concerns over the sustainability of external funding have tended to undermine partnership.
- Staff rotation in key posts in developing countries (and external agencies) continues to undermine partnership.
- The shift to SWAs and PBAs has demanded different skills from the staff of external agencies, skills which are difficult for them to field.
- In many countries, ministries of education have not been able to develop strong capacities in the absence of an effective programme of national civil service reform. Until management of human resources in the civil service as a whole is stabilized, it is very difficult to achieve continuity of professional expertise in the education sector.

Administrative and Technical Capacity

- Imbalances in administrative and technical capacity between external

agencies and national partners continue to seriously undermine partnership.

- The movement toward PBAs and SWAps has not yet resulted in a reduced administrative burden for developing country partners.

Roles and Participation

- The move to programme based approaches has often led to creation of an inner and outer group of external support agencies - with a detrimental effect on the quality and diversity of advice and support available to national governments.
- Programmes are more and more characterized by dialogue which is managerial and which excludes key national stakeholders such as teachers.

Relevance to Local Context

- External agencies continue to introduce and advocate for solutions and approaches which are not appropriate to the local context in which they are provided.

- Goals established at both the national and community level are often inappropriate to the capacities of the institutions and stakeholders involved.

Modalities of External Support

- Analysis of the shift from project to programme modalities suggests that the impact has not necessarily been one of strengthening partnership. While it has been strengthened in some countries it seems to have been weakened in others.
- It is clear that project support for education has played an important role in supporting innovation and the development of new practices.
- The shift from predominantly a project support approach to basic education to an umbrella programme will be more likely have a positive influence on partnership when it includes:
 - A commitment from partner governments, programme funding agencies and project supporting agencies (including

- those engaged in advocacy, policy dialogue and TA) to allow for full participation in programme processes of planning, monitoring and evaluation by project supporting agencies;
- Mechanisms for wider consultations with key stakeholders from outside government and the external support agencies;
 - An approach to programme support that recognizes the role of projects in pilot testing innovations at regional and local levels, as well as nationally;
 - Explicit planning for links from projects to programmes so that innovations and pilot tests are not left isolated from national level funding and support;
 - Significant financial and technical assistance to develop the administrative and technical capacity of key units in the partner ministries of government so that they are able to design, commission and carry out programme and project planning, monitoring, review and evaluation tasks, and can take overall responsibility for those functions.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK?

The global document review carried out for the Joint Evaluation of External Support to Basic Education and the five subsequent country case studies (four for the Joint Evaluation and one of BPEP II in Nepal) point to a number of different strategies and approaches in the pursuit of partnership which have not worked and **which are apt to reduce the effectiveness of efforts to accelerate girls' achievements in education**. They can be summarized as follows:

- Donor-driven programme priorities and programme components (including operational and administrative features and innovations) which are apt to be inappropriate to the capacity of the education systems as a whole as well as to community structures which support them;
- Centralized systems of national control over the education system which impose standardized approaches down to the school level;
- Expectations of community management which impose elaborate systems of planning and allocating resources without adequate support from the centre;
- Policy dialogue and technical assistance which is conducted among a small group of national experts and external agency

representatives and which excludes parents, teachers and key civil society organizations;

- Goals which are clearly beyond the national and local capacity to be achieved;
- The creation of grass roots or community based governance elements such as school management committees or aboriginal education councils on the expectation that they represent a quick fix without continuing support and capacity development;
- High donor visibility in programme elements;
- Monitoring of a wide array of indicators using different systems and approaches to monitoring, evaluation and performance measurement based on the needs of different external agencies.

One might well ask why these practices persist when they are so often demonstrated to have a negative impact on programme effectiveness. The answer may be found in the fact that **meaningful and effective partnership in education - including in efforts to accelerate girls' participation - requires donors, multilateral agencies, national governments and civil society organizations including national and local NGOs to change their behaviour in important ways.** To do that they need to turn to what works in partnership for advancing progress in education.

WHAT DOES WORK?

In contrast to what has not worked in seeking effective partnership in education programming, the evaluations reviewed do provide some strong indications of what can work. These can be found in each element of the factors promoting partnership.

Continuity

If partnership is to be an effective strategy for accelerating progress in girls' education in South Asia, external and internal partners will need to make a strong commitment to promote greater continuity in many aspects of their work together. In particular:

- National governments and supporting external agencies will

need to maintain a consistent policy priority for achieving progress in girls' education;

- External agencies will need to commit to consistent funding (and national governments will need to make matching commitments from their own budgets);
- Both external agencies and national governments will need to commit to greater continuity of staffing as well as to transparency in staff selection and appointment;
- National governments will need to establish a broader political consensus on directions in basic education policy and programming,

including an emphasis on girls' participation and achievement.

Addressing Technical and Administrative Imbalances

- External agencies need to provide continued strong support to capacity development among their partners including national school systems and community organizations;
- External agencies must continue to seek ways to simplify their administrative requirements and to rely more fully on national systems of monitoring and evaluation (which themselves will need to be strengthened);
- External agencies will need to demonstrate that they 'value' the knowledge, expertise and opinions of national and local partners - especially girl children, their parents and front line teachers.

Respecting Roles and Broadening Participation

- Care must be taken to avoid the development of critical national programmes based on a narrow technical and managerial dialogue

carried out between external experts and a small group of national specialists in one or two ministries;

- Key stakeholder groups at national and community levels need to be brought into the process of developing a consensus on programme goals and directions. In particular, parents and teachers as well as key civil society organizations should be part of the effort to develop a consensus.

Ensuring Relevance and Validity to Local Context

- Innovations and changes in practice at the school level need to be implemented based on the experience and abilities of practitioners at that level;
- For innovations to be implemented on a wider scale, they must be accurately costed and be affordable in the context of the national budget (and consistent with national norms and standards for teacher remuneration, etc.);
- While community management may work as a strategy for ensuring more relevance to local needs, it will

require sustained support from the centre and should not be used to offload national responsibilities;

- Experience developed in one country in a region such as South Asia is more likely to be relevant to other countries in the region than innovations based on practice in donor countries. Regional collaboration is an effective strategy for spreading innovation.

Creative Use of Aid Modalities

- Evaluation experience clearly shows that **how** programme-based approaches are identified, negotiated and implemented is much more important than **whether** these approaches are used. Good practice during programme design is more important than achieving the best technical design. In particular,

efforts to broaden participation and to achieve a stronger national consensus during programme development can make these programmes more effective. At the same time, there is clear evidence that projects and programmes can co-exist and that projects can be an effective way of promoting innovation within the context of a wider sector programme.

In reality, external agencies and their national and local partners will only achieve meaningful and effective partnership for advancing girls' education if they can bring together in equal measure commitment, flexibility and realism: **commitment** in terms of key priorities and stable resources; **flexibility** in terms of innovation and approaches chosen; and **realism** in terms of goal setting and expectations.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON GIRLS' EDUCATION

There remains the question of why a concern for more effective partnership should be central to a strategy for accelerating girls' education. If evaluations seem to show that advances in basic education are being undercut by relatively poor or weak models of partnership, then improvements should benefit both boys and girls!

The answer to this question is both general to the nature of primary and early secondary education and specific to the elements of partnership.

At the general level it is clear that weaknesses and deficiencies in the basic system of accessible and affordable public primary and secondary

education have more of an impact on girls' attendance and performance than they do for boys. These weaknesses hurt everyone, but they hurt girls more than boys. This happens basically for two reasons: girls are more vulnerable to security and basic infrastructure problems; and families are more ready to make financial sacrifices (including the cost of private schooling) for boys than they are for girls. Wherever the public system of education is desperately weak we can expect it to fail to meet girls' needs at an even greater rate than it does boys'.

At the same time, it is worth examining how some weaknesses in partnership have especially negative consequence for girls' education.

In relation to **continuity** the evaluations have shown that:

- Fluctuations in external funding (and local budget allotments) often mean that new initiatives to train and employ more women teachers are interrupted, dropped or reversed. This is especially true when control of teacher salaries or teacher numbers is made a condition for external support;
- High levels of rotation of senior staff in ministries of education has tended to favour established employment patterns and undermined initiatives in favour of women administrators and teachers as well as efforts to encourage girls' participation.

In the area of **roles and participation**:

- The emergence of inner and outer circles of external agencies has often tended to strengthen the hand of agencies whose interest is system-wide administrative and economic reform - a focus on efficiency. It has tended to reduce the influence of agencies like UNICEF which have pressed strongly

for measures to increase girls' participation.

- As the move to SWAPs has tended to increase the influence of central financial and administrative ministries and led to a more closed dialogue, the influence of teachers' unions, civil society organizations and local communities has tended to be diminished. While these organizations are not uniformly committed to increasing gender equality in education, they are often able to provide strong arguments for increasing the roles and number of women teachers and for making practical adjustments to school hours, infrastructure and curriculum which may benefit girls.

Relevance to local context is perhaps the most important aspect of effective partnership and its impact on girls' attendance and achievement in primary and secondary schooling:

- Pressures to keep girls at home (including their labour roles) are often rooted in local practices and require working with the local community to be addressed. They may also require some adjustments

in the school's hours of operation for example. This is hard to do in an overly centralized system;

- Girls and their parents (and female teachers) need to be consulted on efforts to improve security, infrastructure, water and sanitation and other critical aspects of the school day if programmes are to have an impact.
- Goal setting and budget allocations based on central norms which do not take into account the capacities and needs of local schools continue to undermine support for reform at the community level. This in turn causes problems in maintaining support for giving a priority to girls' education at the municipal, school and even family levels.

An examination of the **modalities of external support** highlights the fact that:

- Shifting to entirely programme based approaches tends to reduce innovation in the system -

innovations which are essential to finding simple and cost-effective ways to promote girls' achievement;

- SWAps and PBAs in basic education often contain strict conditionalities which limit classroom resources and expenditures, further discouraging investment in girls' participation;
- Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms put in place to monitor SWAps and PBAs remain overly complex in their efforts to meet the needs of multiple donors. As a result, they often place little emphasis on setting and tracking clear indicators of goals' achievement in girls' participation.

In summary, improving the quality of partnership in basic education (and their effectiveness) will not only improve the level of service and achievements of all children: it should have a positive differential impact on the effort to accelerate progress towards gender equality in education.

WHAT ABOUT QUALITY?

One feature of the MDGs relating to education is their focus on enrolment (at least in their use of enrolment in primary and secondary schools as key indicators). Section 3 above has argued that a factor in achieving equality in girls' education is the quality of the experience for girls attending schools. This relates to one of the most critical and important findings of recent evaluation work dealing with basic education in developing countries - the persisting problem of poor quality instruction and limited learning achievements.

Many evaluations, including the ones reviewed here, have pointed out that efforts to reach the EFA and MDG goals

in education have been much more successful in increasing enrolments than in improving the quality of education and enhancing learning achievement. Some at UNICEF have used the phrase 'warehouses for children' to describe inadequate schools providing unsafe environments and poor quality and irrelevant education to children who themselves are too malnourished or have too poor health to take advantage of what is being offered.

External support has had some success in improving the infrastructure of schools and has had even more in increasing the rates of enrolment of girls and boys, but it has not been very successful to date in helping to improve the quality of

teaching and learning at the classroom level. This finding has been almost universal in evaluations carried out over the past 12 years (including those sponsored by UNICEF, the World Bank, the EU and a range of developed and developing countries).

Yet, the quality of teaching and learning and the security and safety of the school environment are apt to be crucial in encouraging girls' attendance and achievements in primary and secondary school. In order for gender equality and

for the spirit of the MDGs in education to be achieved, schools will need to be transformed into places where children genuinely profit from spending their time.

Providing a genuinely safe, secure and healthy school environment where teaching and learning quality is assured for girls (and for boys) represents a critical challenge which underlies the basic rationale of the MDGs in education.

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ANNEX

Comparison of the Key Findings of the Joint Evaluation of External Support to Basic Education and the Joint Government-Donor Evaluation of BPEP II in Nepal

JEBE Global Evaluation: Key Conclusions

- 1 There has been a strong tendency for external agencies to place increasing emphasis on the use of external support for accelerating progress in basic education, especially in relation to the education goals of the MDGs and to the EFA goals. This tendency has been accompanied, at times, by a reliance on blueprints, templates and prescribed solutions that has been detrimental to a commitment to partnership, has been inconsistent with the capacities of partners and has sometimes limited the relevance of programmes and projects. There is a need to place greater emphasis on the relevance of external support to local needs and capacities - for more tailored local solutions within a global consensus on goals.

BPEP II Evaluation: Similarities and Differences

- The evidence for BPEP II is mixed on this account. On one hand it did combine difficult goals in capacity development (including establishing many critical organizational elements) with fairly aggressive goals in education access and quality. But on the other, BPEP II did allow for an expanding role in coordination, design and development for HMG/N and for national and international NGOs.
- It is essential that the goals and targets of the new EFA programme be suited to capacities at both a national and local level.

JEBE Global Evaluation: Key Conclusions

- 2 The movement to programme support and SWAps is one of the most significant trends in the provision and use of external support to basic education. It has been intended, at least in part, to contribute to strengthened national ownership and to improve partnership (and thereby improve the effectiveness of the provision and use of external support). In a real sense, the shift to programme support is an indication of the commitment of external agencies to strengthen partnership. However, this form of support does not necessarily improve partnership if implemented as a blueprint rather than a process. It has, in some cases, contributed to increased tensions and divisions among distinct groups of external agencies. On the positive side, it has led to some improvements in the sense of national ownership and to better coordination of external assistance.
- 3 The movement to supporting basic education through SWAps and other forms of programme support needs to be accompanied by an understanding of the positive role of project assistance, especially in supporting innovations and in providing targeted support to marginalized groups. There is considerable evidence that project forms of support can be more effectively integrated into programme approaches with the consequent effect of strengthening the positive aspects of both modalities.

BPEP II Evaluation: Similarities and Differences

- BPEP II illustrates the main thrust of this finding rather well. By moving to a basket fund and sub-sector approach with BPEP II, HMG/N and external agencies did provide for a better integration of the programme management unit into the MOES and did set the stage for some evolutionary movement toward more national ownership. However, the way that BPEP II was designed, developed and implemented in its early years (as evaluators were frequently told by key informants from virtually all agencies interviewed) clearly was not participatory, inclusive and wide ranging.
 - This has been an ongoing debate within and around BPEP II. Not so much in terms of project versus programme assistance, but more in terms of basket funding versus direct financing (which some associate with fast-moving, innovative and project-like activities). The evidence for BPEP II is mixed but the evaluation team feels strongly that, at this point in time, the need in Nepal is for activities to be more integrated rather than more independent.
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JEBE Global Evaluation: Key Conclusions

- 4 The movement to programme approaches in supporting basic education has not always been accompanied, at least in the short term, by a reduction in the administrative burden for host governments. A very heavy burden of planning, coordination and monitoring has been made more difficult by uneven progress in the development of common administrative procedures among external agencies and a reluctance to accept local processes as adequate.
- 5 Although there is agreement on the broad range of components included in basic education, in reality the focus of most activities of both external agencies and national partners has been placed on formal primary schooling with negative effects on other areas of basic education. Further, while progress has been made in providing access to primary schooling, there are serious persistent problems in improving the quality of basic education.
- 6 There has been a sustained agreement within the international community, including external agencies and national partners, on the priority of basic education, but funding levels from the external agencies have not kept pace with expectations or implied commitments. This is, at least in part, a reflection of the complexity of planning and resource allocation processes surrounding the provision of external support and to problems in the absorptive capacity of partner governments.

BPEP II Evaluation: Similarities and Differences

- This conclusion is clearly borne out in the case of BPEP II, which saw the early years of the programme accompanied by a slowdown in the pace of programme activities as HMG/N personnel mastered the complexities of the basket fund. In addition, the evaluation team was able to view firsthand the intensity, duration, complexity and delicacy of the ongoing negotiations for the EFA programme.
- Once again this is strongly borne out in the case of BPEP II. While there are some initiatives in non-formal education, the agency responsible (NFEC) receives support at a much lower level than other elements of the system and remains bureaucratically, financially and technically weaker than other units.
- On the other hand, the EFA programme planned for 2004-2009 includes a much higher profile for NFE.
- In this area at least, BPEP II seems quite different from the programmes studied in the Global Evaluation since Nepal seems to be able to count on sustained and, perhaps, increasing support from external agencies, at least in the short and medium term.

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Ted Freeman is the Managing Partner of the Canadian public policy research firm, Goss Gilroy Inc. He has spent over 25 years engaged in the evaluation of international development projects, programmes and agencies. In 2002/03 he served as the lead evaluator of a major global evaluation of external support to basic education undertaken for a consortium of 13 bilateral and multilateral development agencies and 4 developing countries. In 2004 he led the joint donor-government evaluation of Nepal's Basic and Primary Education Programme II (BPEPII). His primary area of interest is the coordination of international development cooperation and its alignment with national and local priorities and capacities - achieving social development results through meaningful partnerships.

