

EFA Global Action Week 2009 Asia and Pacific UNGEI Statement 20-26 April 2009

Closing the Gender Gap: Youth and Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning

No strategy for development has proven as effective as the empowerment of women, yet of the 500 million+ illiterate adults across the Asia and Pacific region, two-thirds are women.

Continued access to education and training for all citizens is an investment in the future, a pre-condition for economic advance, democracy, social cohesion, and personal growth. However, millions of children remain out of school across the region. South Asia alone has 35 million children who are not in school, over half of whom are girls. Millions more remain in the classroom but run the risk of not learning even the basic competencies.

Countries throughout the Asia and the Pacific face the risk of perpetuating the cycle of poverty and disempowerment if we fail in our collective efforts to achieve Education for All.

On the occasion of the EFA Global Action Week, the Asia and Pacific United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) urges the renewed commitment to uphold education as an inalienable human right. Education is a right held by everyone, but it has special significance for girls and women. It is therefore particularly important for governments who have the obligations to ensure that this right is met through gender-responsive strategy for youth and adult literacy and lifelong learning.

Investing in the education of girls delivers high returns on many levels, not only for female educational attainment and lifelong learning opportunities, but also for maternal and children's health, women's empowerment, employment opportunities, democracy, income growth and productivity. For example, research shows that a child born to an educated mother is 50% more likely to survive past the age of 5 years. In Thailand, and in most countries in the region, the higher a mother's level of education, the greater the chances that her child will be literate. The inter-generational impact of girls' education needs to be better communicated to convince communities to value girls' education equally or more.

The Declaration from the UN Literacy Decade 2003-2012 recognizes that girls who have been educated are likely to marry at a later age, and to have smaller, healthier families. Educated women recognize the importance of health care and access it for their entire family. Education helps girls to realize their rights. This is vital to harness the productive capacity of young women, in addition to that of young men, towards long-term and sustainable dynamism and progress of the region.

Therefore, concerted action on the part of Governments must be taken to ensure that education policies are inclusive and to make strides towards gender parity and equality in education throughout life. Such efforts, must seek to address the multiplicity of factors and barriers that prevent girls and women from accessing education- cultural, institutional, economic - in order to ensure equal access and inclusion to foundational education and life long learning opportunities for girls and boys.

It's the world's poorest who are missing out on an education today. And it's the world's poorest who stand the most to gain if they only had the chance to learn.

The Asia and Pacific Regional UNGEI urges countries to ensure the provision of quality education for all children regardless of their sex, ethnicity, caste, income level, disability or any other factor which might exclude them from their right to quality education

The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) is the Education For All flagship for girls' education and the principal movement to narrow the gender gap in primary and secondary education, and to ensure that by 2015, all children everywhere will be able to complete primary schooling, and that by then, girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education.

UNGEI works through partnerships with organizations committed to these goals at global, regional, and country levels. To learn more about UNGEI, visit www.ungei.org.

The Asia and Pacific Regional UNGEI partners are: Asia Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE), Baha'i International Community, BRAC, Commonwealth Secretariat, CARE, Education Development Center (EDC), Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi (ITA), International Labour Organization (ILO) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, International Planned Parenthood Foundation South Asia Region (IPPF SAR), Oxfam Great Britain, Plan Asia Regional Office, Save the Children Sweden, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Secretariat, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Regional Support Team, Asia Pacific United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) East Asia and Pacific Regional Office and Regional Office for South Asia, and World Vision Foundation of Thailand.