

CATALYST

for Education and Gender Equality

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SUDAN: This girl is sitting with classmates in her Grade 4 class in the Krindig camp on the outskirts of El Geneina, capital of West Darfur.

FEATURE ESSAY

Girls' education as power for development

Human rights and economic growth in alignment

Education is a universal human right. It empowers girls by helping them achieve other basic human rights – a spiral of power in their lives, grounded in education. But beyond their attainment of individual rights, girls' education has also proven to be a remarkably effective catalyst for social development and economic growth in developing countries. So it is in some sense not only the individual girl who is empowered – it is the broader society.

In the discourse of development, the functionalist case for growth often sits uneasily with moral and ethical arguments for universal rights – the tension of the qualitative versus the quantitative. But as we reflect on what 'empowerment' means for girls today and how best to achieve a world fit for all children, it is important to consider that rights-based

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Conversation, at its best, is a true catalyst for action – when people with unique perspectives share their views freely, when we really listen to each other, social change can feel feasible, imminent. In these pages, one can hear the strains of a conversation that is really a call to action. Hear a young social anthropologist translate the messages he believes young people in difficult situations worldwide are conveying if we would only pay attention. Listen to a development practitioner, Charles Nabongo, and a member of parliament, Aloisea Inyumba, describe the experience of implementing a national school campaign in Rwanda. Hear about the violent threats to schools and students in Afghanistan. Listen to a discussion of the tensions and intersections of human rights and economic growth, and learn about the work of partners for girls' education, empowerment, and gender equality. Most importantly, listen to the brave girls from the world's developing countries as they speak to us in words and pictures.

Welcome to *Catalyst for Education and Gender Equality*, a publication of UNICEF, where we will look to bridge gaps between development education research and experience, theory and practice. We hope in some small way to facilitate a lingua franca for education, gender equality and development that connects diverse constituencies and crosses disciplinary and experiential borders. A catalyst is a spark, and we seek to spark this kind of action-inspiring conversation every issue. We hope you will join in. (You can write to us at pubdoc@unicef.org) Because when lessons go unlearned and perspectives remain unshared, we are all the poorer. We're here, then, to steer these various streams of discourse back to their source: **children, their lives and their futures.**

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS ON EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUALITY

MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education

By 2005: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education.

By 2015: Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling.

MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

By 2015: Eliminate gender disparity at all levels of education and empower women.

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approaches and data about economic growth and development may be a most effective prescription for progress when taken together.

DEFINING EMPOWERMENT FOR GIRLS TODAY

Empowerment as a generic term may have become somewhat vague from overuse. Yet inherent in the word is *power*, a commodity in uneven distribution in the world – implying that *empowerment* remains the remedy for inequality today.

In particular, power remains beyond reach for many of the world's girls and women. For girls in the world's developing countries as for children everywhere, power means growing up to make free and informed decisions, to be an equal partner and decision-maker in one's household and community, to attain genuine agency in society. Education can put girls on that path to power in womanhood. Girls with a quality basic education are less likely to marry early and against their will; less likely to die in childbirth; and more likely to have healthy babies themselves and to send their children to school, thus passing along these positive social benefits to the next generation. Empowerment, thus defined, is a process of meaningful change, one person at a time, from one generation to the next.

Consider what a lack of power means to girls in developing countries. Across the developing world, a quarter of girls did not attend primary school in the decade between 1996 and 2005 (as measured by the net attendance rate).¹ At the transition to secondary school, the number of girls leaving the education system behind is astonishing: the attendance rate for girls was a meager 43 per cent during that decade. Little surprise, then, that fewer than three quarters of adult women across the developing world are literate.

The numbers vary from region to region. The female populations of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are particularly marginalized and undereducated, but more hopeful numbers are emerging from Latin America and East Asia. And many countries have made significant progress since 2000, when the nations of the world first articulated the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). But fluctuations across the regions and even progress aside, the basic problem remains: Uneducated or undereducated girls find themselves, across the life cycle, more vulnerable than their better-educated cohort to gender-based violence, abuse, exploitation, trafficking and disease (including AIDS).

Can academic research help to empower girls in developing countries?
The answer is: It already has.

When examined this way, *girls' empowerment through education is power for development.*

A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO EDUCATION AND GENDER²

Equal access to education for girls. Universal completion of primary school. A bridge to secondary education for both girls and boys that cannot easily be broken. Empowerment of girls through education that addresses their real needs and their real lives. These are ideals that UNICEF is working for in country after country – often in the face of violent conflict, natural disaster or other chronic crises.

The right to education is well established in international covenants. Every child has the right to education, as articulated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirmed in numerous meetings and agreements since, including the Regional Conferences on Education (1960-1966) of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and at conferences such as the World Summit for Children (1990), the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand (1990), the World Education Forum in Dakar (2000) and the Millennium Declaration (2000).

This legacy of education as a human right fuels the current drive to achieve universal primary education and to promote gender equality and empower women. But the right to education integrates and encompasses development concerns as well – the promotion of human rights and the promotion of economic growth are not mutually exclusive. Any tension between a rights-based approach and one that seeks economic growth disappears if one views rights and growth not in opposition but as necessary co-requisites. A strong case can be made that failure to ensure human rights hinders economic growth, while without a healthy economy, poverty becomes a scourge that eats away at individual rights.

Therefore, empowering girls is a win-win proposition. When girls are educated, not only are their rights as individuals fulfilled, but society enjoys the myriad benefits that their education yields. This understanding is implicit in MDGs 2 and 3 (see page 2), which seek to achieve universal primary education and to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, respectively.

To help countries achieve MDGs 2 and 3, UNICEF is actively and strategically pursuing the following objectives: 1) to ensure that all children have equal access to quality education (partly by working for the abolition of onerous school fees) – in schools designed to serve their best interests (this emphasis on quality in education has its apotheosis in the Child-Friendly School model); 2) to help prepare children for school in early childhood through a series of targeted community interventions; 3) to promote completion of a full cycle of education, in part by enhancing the role of schools as centers of community services such as school feeding, psychosocial care and support, health and nutrition – all designed to keep vulnerable and at-risk youth in school; 4) to help the education sector address gender disparities in the earliest stages of learning, partly through gender mainstreaming; 5) to make gender appropriateness an integral part of the notion of educational quality at the primary and post-primary levels, from curriculum to infrastructure (this is a built-in feature of the Child-Friendly School model);

SRI LANKA: Grade 8 girls attend a social studies class in a temporary classroom at Al-Arham Vidyalaya School in the Adalalachenai area in the eastern district of Ampara.



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© UNICEF/H006-0821/Noorani

SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC: A woman teacher helps a girl during a computer class, in a school sponsored by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East school in the Jaramana camp for Palestinian refugees, in Damascus.

and 6) to empower girls and boys in their educational experiences, enabling them to reach their potential and achieve a full and meaningful adulthood.

Empowering girls and boys through education is partly a matter of national policy and planning. So governments should be encouraged to move gender awareness into the mainstream of national education sector plans. Gender-disaggregated data highlight educational disparities and are an essential tool for analyzing national education budgets for gender inclusiveness – which is vital to help ensure ample support for gender equality and empowerment.

Empowerment is also very much a matter of what transpires in the classroom – a matter of curriculum and pedagogy. Life skills-based education with a gender focus helps teachers tackle the difficult issues of HIV infection and gender-based violence. There is also recognition, particularly at the post-primary level, that adolescents are often parents too; culturally specific parenting knowledge should be part of the life skills curriculum.

Finally, empowerment for girls is about the broader social environment in which they find themselves – role modeling is more than mere symbolism. The increasing presence and professionalism of female teachers, school heads and senior officials, and the growing visibility of women in key positions in politics and development, are crucial if both girls and boys are to grow up to create a more equitable society.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the empowerment promised in MDGs 2 and 3 is the rising tide of countries where emergencies and crises – whether wars and recurring conflicts or natural disasters – are sapping educational systems and endangering childhood in ways large and small. The inherent difficulty of reaching children in these situations poses a genuine threat to the future of many countries. But in this challenge is an opportunity: The aftermath of crisis is a chance to build education systems back better than they were. (A coming issue of *Catalyst* will be devoted to education in emergencies.)

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Listening to children – even when we don't like what we hear

University of Oxford's Jason Hart on children-focused research

Dr. Jason Hart, trained as a social anthropologist at the University of London, is currently a university lecturer and research officer with the Refugee Studies Centre at University of Oxford researching children's experiences in armed conflict and displacement. Hart has spent much of his professional life not lecturing but listening to children, and he is concerned that what children say is not sufficiently reflected in the educational policies formulated on their behalf. Hence his call for a change in methodology to what he calls "children-focused research."

"Children-focused research implicitly rejects the notion that children's ideas, experiences, needs and aspirations are adequately articulated by adults, however well-intentioned," Hart has written. "The role of the researcher should be to enable young people to participate in research as fully as they wish, sharing their views safely and to their own satisfaction." Hart dismisses the claim that children, in effect, can't express what is in their best interests. "That even young children are fully capable of articulating important insights into their lives has been amply demonstrated in numerous research settings."

Hart says that one ultimate purpose of children-focused research in conflict situations is actually utilitarian: to formulate more effective education policies. "There is a specific need in the research and debates about schooling to ensure that the primary stakeholders – the students themselves – are properly attended to," Hart explained via email interview. "I have found that much of the literature on education in conflict and post-conflict settings pays a good deal of attention to institutional and technical matters such as curricular content, teacher training, infrastructural issues and so on. By comparison, the will to understand the specific concerns, experiences and aspirations of children who are intended to benefit from educational programmes is often far less evident."

Yet it's safe to assume that those engaged in education policy in conflict and post-conflict settings aren't discounting children's experiences deliberately. Why, then, the inadequate attention to children themselves? "This may be due to an assumption that children's needs are universal and well understood," says Hart. His experiences listening to children – in places as geographically

diverse as Bhutan, India, Jordan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Uganda – have taught him the opposite. Indeed, Hart's argument, challenging for many policy people, may align him more with those in-country development practitioners who, like Hart, find themselves talking to children regularly.

"A children-focused approach to research in conflict settings does not assume uniformity in the psychological, material or social situation of children," Hart writes. "It instead seeks to discover the complex ways in which conflict affects different children's lives, creating opportunities as well as new challenges. Conventional, school-system-focused research tends to assume vulnerability as an inherent property of children in conflict zones, but what we need is an approach that seeks to understand how vulnerability – as a condition – is produced and mitigated." In sum, Hart says that children-focused research "assumes that the impact of conflict on each child will be different."

"Statements are made about the young when we should be producing knowledge with them."
– Jason Hart

But policymakers are themselves navigating difficult institutional waters in order to deliver programmes to children effectively. Wouldn't abandoning broad commonalities for narrow specifics leave policymakers overwhelmed? Not in the long run, Hart believes. He suggests a more targeted approach to educational programming for children in conflict and post-conflict situations.

"In my own work as a researcher, many commonalities have emerged," Hart acknowledges. "However, there are always issues that are specific to young people in each setting. These issues often have a

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Reclaiming Rwanda's future – one child at a time

Senator Aloisea Inyumba and UNICEF Education Officer Charles Nabongo on a government-NGO partnership

Crowds of students, banners flying, and a rousing speech by Rwanda's First Lady, Jeannette Kagame, marked the launch of Rwanda's new five-year education campaign on 1 March 2007. "We need to help Rwandan girls strengthen their self-confidence so that they can confront the challenges that exist in life," the First Lady proclaimed. "Women can do everything that men can do; they should not be intimidated." The campaign will support girls' retention and achievement in school and encourage them to study traditionally 'male' subjects such as science, to bring them into the forefront of their nation's development.

The ceremony in the northern town of Ruhengeri was full of promise, as the academic careers of a generation of Rwandan girls waited to blossom in the bright future. Equally hopeful, though, for development practitioners like UNICEF Rwanda's Education Project Manager Charles Nabongo, was the soil in which this ambitious campaign was rooted – the soil of genuine partnership. The First Lady's Office and the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) worked closely with UNICEF and a host of NGOs and government bodies to develop and implement the campaign. "Over time, we have built a strong partnership – the Girls' Education Task Force," Nabongo explains. "It is composed of MINEDUC,

the Ministry of Gender, NGOs such as the Forum for African Women Educationalists, Profemmes and DFID (who now play a steering role), and government institutions like the National Women's Council and National Youth Council. It is a strong partnership that wouldn't work if we hadn't gained the confidence of the government."

It was not ever thus. When Nabongo first came to Rwanda's capital, Kigali, in 2004, he was faced with several challenges. The government had made real progress on gender parity in enrolment in primary school, but fewer than half of the children were going on to complete school. "Drop-out rates were still high," he says, "especially among girls. Child participation fell statutorily between MINEDUC and the Ministry of Youth, so the mechanism was not being established. And there was a tremendous need to disaggregate the data on girls' education so we could first address the challenges to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)."

Fortunately, Nabongo was working with a government that had already demonstrated a genuine commitment to gender equality in education. Rwanda had made great strides on gender parity in primary school enrolment when Nabongo arrived from his previous post as UNICEF education officer in Uganda.

"There is genuine political will," he says. "Rwanda has adopted a sector-wide approach (SWAP), which emphasizes rational planning based on priorities voiced by all stakeholders, with transparency and greater participation. A five-to-ten-year planning cycle has been adopted – and girls' education is one of the key priorities in that plan."

The government's concern with empowering girls and women through a variety of means, including girls' education, dates back to the early aftermath of the 1994 genocide – as Rwanda's Senator Aloisea Inyumba can attest. Inyumba served as Rwanda's first Minister of Family, Gender and Social Affairs after the genocide. "In 1994 the social, economic and cultural fabric was destroyed. The majority of women were traumatized," she says. "A large number of them had been sexually abused and displaced. Some fled and some were taken as sexual hostages."

RWANDA: A teacher working with her students in a child-friendly school, Spring 2007.



© UNICEF/2007/Kitaburaza



“ These young girls will be the anchor of this nation. ”

– Aloisea Inyumba

“Setting up a strong Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Affairs after the genocide demonstrated that a strong gender policy was going to be a basis for building a strong nation,” Inyumba says. “Our government recognized women and gave them a vital role to play in rebuilding the country.”

Inyumba’s continued presence in public life is a testament to Rwanda’s efforts to empower women and to present girls with visible role models to inspire them to stay in school. Currently a senator in the Rwandan Parliament and a member of the Senate Committee on Political Affairs and Good Governance, Inyumba also works on behalf of the First Lady’s office as a role model for girls’ education, traveling throughout the country to encourage girls to stay in school, a role she also played in this year’s education campaign.

“I was among the women designated to talk to students, especially young girls, and share with them our belief in the importance of education,” Inyumba explains. “We give them examples of women who have achieved due to education. We also talk about the importance of studying science subjects and mathematics, because traditionally girls are drawn to humble skills, but now we focus on the capacity for women to build a nation.”

Inyumba stresses the connection between the current education campaign and the role the government hopes women will play in Rwanda’s ongoing renewal. “We are targeting rural communities, encouraging families to send their young children to school. We have also started programmes on functional literacy specifically reaching out to young girls and women. As a country which suffered genocide,” she says, “the heaviest toll of this tragic event fell on women. If we create opportunities for girls, we are building the nation, because it is these young girls that are going to be the anchor of this nation.”

Nabongo concurs. “This school campaign is an important initiative to raise awareness and support at

the political level and to scale up school and community efforts aimed at gender parity. The campaign is at the center of the country strategy for reaching the MDGs. All primary and secondary schools in the country are being mobilized to implement well-documented best practices for ensuring that girls stay and achieve in school.”

It is an effort that can only be enhanced by strong partnerships, according to Nabongo – and he is very clear on the role of UNICEF. “On the government side there is commitment, but the main challenge is in the implementation,” he points out. “UNICEF works very closely with MINEDUC on girls’ education, mainly by providing technical assistance in the form of research and information gathering, knowledge sharing, training of staff for skills enhancement, strengthening of networking mechanisms with other key stakeholders to enrich planning and resource mobilization. We also work with MINEDUC to keep alive the international linkages and commitments such as Education For All.” Nabongo says that UNICEF helps develop policies with MINEDUC, one critical example under his tenure being the government’s promulgation of the Minimum Quality Package – a school building and enhancement model based on UNICEF’s Child-Friendly Schools model that Nabongo deems “quite significant – it will lead to scaling up of best practices.”

But Nabongo is clear about government ownership of the entire process: “UNICEF is a facilitator in the entire partnership process with the government and NGOs. Care has to be taken to ensure government remains in the driver’s seat and government institutions are developed, not undermined. The school campaign is a good example – it is now fully integrated in the MINEDUC plan and budget. It is not a parallel project.”

“As a result of the policy framework established,” he says, “the government now routinely allocates significant resources for girls’ education, and we’re hopeful that the school campaign will accelerate this effort.” ❖

Girls speak out on war in the DRC and labour in Nepal

A 15-YEAR-OLD CHILD USED BY AN ARMED GROUP ADDRESSES THE UNITED NATIONS

"What happens to these girl soldiers is not their fault. We were victims of the selfish interests of parties acting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We have been forgotten by those people who should have rendered justice regarding the sexual exploitation that we suffered, which amounts to sex slavery. We regret we were forgotten by those who should have helped us. Between 70 and 80 per cent of us were demobilized with babies, and they're children that are undesirable for the world, without speaking of the diseases that we acquired. I ask myself what is our future after being demobilized. The world must recognize this crime and ask for forgiveness for these girl soldiers."



Madeleine is from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She was forcibly recruited by the Mai Mai militia in her country. In this excerpt from a speech given at the Girls Speak Out Forum, hosted by UNICEF as part of the 51st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, 2 March 2007, Madeleine decries sexual violence in war and describes the difficulties of reintegration into society. Girls are used as sex slaves, she said, and many return from combat with "fatherless" babies, to find themselves stigmatized by the community and outcast.

AN OPEN LETTER TO FINANCE MINISTERS FROM A NEPALESE GIRL STUDENT

"My name is Sunita, and I am 15 years old. I live with my mother and sister in Biratnagar in eastern Nepal. When I was still a young child my father abandoned us, leaving us even poorer than we had been before. To make ends meet, my mother took a job in a jute mill, and I started working at a matchstick factory. School for me was out of the question – we simply couldn't afford it.

But that changed in 1999, when I found out about a UNICEF-supported programme offering catch-up classes for out-of-school children like me. I signed up and started taking classes, two hours a day. It was not always easy, but I was motivated to learn and worked really hard. After two years, I caught up to Grade 5. Now I am awaiting the results of my Grade 10 final exams, which for us is the last year of high school. It seems that my motivation and hard work have paid off.

I still have my job at the match factory. I mostly bring work home. I make the boxes and fill them with matches, then take them back to the factory and fetch more materials. I work a total of five to six hours a day. Every two days, when I make 1,000 matchboxes, I get paid 20 rupees – or 30 cents. It is not much, but it is enough for me to buy school supplies for myself and my younger sister. So I am still a working child, but nonetheless an educated one. And I hope to go on to university some day.

I am also helping other children like me to get an education. Together with friends I set up a club for working children in our community. We try to teach them about their rights and how to fight discrimination and HIV/AIDS. Although these children may be forced to work, we believe they should also have a chance to go to school so that their future is better than their present. There are 22 working children clubs in my town, and I was recently selected as chairperson of the Municipal-Level Working Children's Network.

I am writing to you today to remind you of a certain promise you made seven years ago. By telling you first hand how education changed my life, maybe you will feel moved to commit to education for all children. I was only a little girl when the international community pledged to send all the world's children to school by 2015. That deadline approaches, and we are still lagging behind. I don't understand why. If countries have enough money to go to war, they must have enough to send their children to school.

Children who do not go to school may never know anything about their rights. They may never have a chance to climb above poverty or learn to protect themselves from abuse and disease. They may not be able to help their own countries develop. That is why on behalf of the millions of girls and boys who are not as fortunate as I have been, I urge you to set things right. The decisions you make today will affect the lives of many children worldwide. The time to keep your promises on education is NOW!"

Sunita Tamang, aged 15, wrote this letter to participants in the high-level event 'Keeping Our Promises on Education' held in Brussels, 2 May 2007. ❖

The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI)

Leveraging the power of partnership for girls worldwide



The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) was launched in April 2000 at the World Education Forum in Dakar, in response to a disturbing fact: of the millions of children worldwide who were not in school, more than half were girls—which is still the case despite marked progress. UNGEI is a partnership of organizations, committed to ensuring that, by 2015, all children complete primary schooling, and that girls and boys have equal access to free, quality education. Dedicated to forging broad consensus and concerted action, UNGEI embraces the United Nations system, governments, donor countries, nongovernmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, communities and families. The Initiative provides stakeholders with a platform for action and galvanizes their efforts to get girls in school.

The Initiative works at global, regional and country levels. Its Global Advisory Committee is composed of key partners who share in the planning, decision-making, guidance and accountability of the partnership. The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation and the Campaign for Female Education, a UK-based international nonprofit organization working primarily in sub-Saharan Africa, currently co-chair the Committee, and UNICEF serves as the lead agency and Secretariat. Recent co-chairs included the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the UK Department for International Development (DFID). As a true partnership, UNGEI seeks to leverage the comparative advantage of the various partners, thus maximizing results on behalf of girls' education.

UNGEI is the Education for All (EFA) flagship for girls' education. It supports country-led development and seeks to influence decision-making and investments to ensure gender equity and equality in national education policies, plans and programmes. UNGEI operates as a mechanism to advance education strategies and to bolster countries' technical capacity. Partners mobilize resources for targeted project initiatives and country programmes, as well as interventions designed to impact on the policy level. UNGEI streamlines its efforts through the strategic use of existing mechanisms, such as poverty reduction strategies, sector-wide approaches and United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks.

In May 2007, UNGEI completed reviews of the gender components of education plans for Liberia and Sierra Leone, as part of those countries' applications to become partners in the EFA Fast Track Initiative (FTI). This is an example of UNGEI's support for country-led development, in keeping with the goals of FTI.

The admission of Liberia and Sierra Leone brought to 31 the number of countries with education sector plans endorsed by FTI. Of these, UNGEI partners – including the Danish International Development Agency, DFID, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank – serve as lead agency in 20 countries.

Gender parity in school enrolment is an essential first step on the road to empowerment and equality, but it is nonetheless just that – a first step. Fully embracing a gender perspective, to make certain that every aspect of educational policies and programmes is reviewed for impact on girls and boys, is increasingly crucial to UNGEI's vision. This thinking implies attention to the physical needs of girls as well as boys in the design, construction and upkeep of schools as physical plants; it implies a sensitivity to the particular educational needs and experiences of girls as well as boys in the curriculum (in part by promoting sensitivity); and mainstreaming also implies an ongoing effort to provide for the psychosocial needs of girls as well as boys in the services delivered at school, especially in contexts where conflict and culture consign girls to discrimination, abuse, exploitation and gender-based violence.

Furthermore, working to help policy makers understand that a focus on girls also contributes to boys' education is critically important. And knowing the crucial role that educated mothers play in their children's education, forging linkages to adult literacy efforts for women is also essential.

The UNGEI Secretariat is based at UNICEF Headquarters in New York, with Cheryl Gregory Faye becoming Head of the Secretariat in February 2007 after extensive country-level experience. Faye's insights into the situation of children, education sector actors, and partners at the country level is bringing more vigour to UNGEI as it moves to empower girls and educate all children. For more information, see www.ungei.org. ❖



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Books or bullets

Education under attack in Afghanistan

On 12 June 2007, two gunmen on motorbikes approached the Qalai Saeeda girls' school in Afghanistan just as students and teachers were leaving for the day. They opened fire on the crowd, killing two schoolgirls and injuring three others and a teacher. "By attacking students and their teachers," commented Catherine Mbengue, UNICEF Representative in Afghanistan, "the perpetrators are attacking children's right to an education and threatening the very fabric of Afghan society."

The acclaimed school, located near Kabul in the Logar province, shut its gates for almost a month. The principal, internationally praised for her role in bolstering girls' education after the fall of the Taliban, was forced to resign. And although the horrifying incident drew international media attention, other attacks on schools and schoolchildren have occurred with sickening regularity. A particularly grim day was 8 July: Rocket attacks on a primary school in Kunar province killed one child and injured three others. That night, a school in Ghore province was put to the torch. The next day, a marketplace filled with schoolchildren in Uruzgan province was the scene of a suicide bombing.

"The sight of girls in school is an obvious sign of progress," Mbengue said after the Qalai Saeeda killings, "and there are those who are afraid of such progress." Afghanistan's progress in education has been considerable. By the end of 2006, UNICEF estimated that 4.89 million children had enrolled in school, 4.25 million of them in grades 1–6. Their ranks swelled further this year as the government continued to emphasize education: By March, Afghan schoolchildren numbered six million. To meet this demand, UNICEF was assisting the government in recruiting and training teachers – plans were under way to train over 140,000 teachers, and to develop new child-centered and gender-sensitive curricula.

Placing additional demand on the education sector is the return of more than 3.5 million refugees from Pakistan and Iran since the UN High Commissioner for Refugees began a voluntary repatriation programme in 2002, just months after the fall of the Taliban-led government. By the dawn of 2007, approximately 51,000 returned children had enrolled in school. And support for non-traditional education was on the rise also: Over 3,500 children used by armed groups and forces and other war-affected children – 1,391 of them girls – were receiving UNICEF-supported education and skills training; around 48,000 illiterate women in remote villages had enrolled and completed literacy courses in 2006–2007, and additionally over 60,000 illiterate women will receive literacy courses this year.

These numbers are remarkable indeed when measured against the situation in Afghanistan just six years ago. During the Taliban's reign, girls were banned from school, and education had become mostly an arm of the radical state. Even later, as the tide of violence against education was rising at the end of 2006, Afghans could hope that their country's progress in returning its population to school would be sustained.

Sadly, progress has its enemies. The high-profile attacks on education this summer were hardly isolated incidents. In 2006, as boys and girls were beginning to flood the schools, insurgents stepped up their systematic violence against these signs of progress. Between January and July, 2006, an estimated 99 attacks on schools had been reported country-wide, compared to only 12 in the same period in 2005.

The violence has continued this year. "Over 30 attacks against schools, many involving the torching or blowing up of school premises, were reported in all parts of the country from January until June," said Nilab Mobarez of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. By midsummer, at least 262 of the total 740 schools in the four southern provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan and Zabul were shut down, unable to provide any education at all to the children who had been enrolled.

Even without targeted violence against teachers, schools and children, Afghanistan faces a major challenge in educating its people. Twenty per cent of the Afghan population is between 7 and 12 years old, one of the highest proportions of school-age children in the world. Only half of Afghanistan's boys can read. Among young women aged 15 to 24, the literacy rate is a shockingly low 18 per cent. Only 32 per cent of boys – and 13 per cent of girls – complete primary school. Those were the cold, hard facts even before militants began their long hot summer of pressure on the education sector. ❖

SCHOLARSHIP AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT

Can academic research help to empower girls in developing countries? The answer is: It already has.

Recent scholarship has shown what development practitioners have long observed in the field: that educating the female populace doesn't just benefit individual girls, it has a positive impact on a whole range of social and economic development indicators. These cascading benefits include increased productivity and economic growth. Indeed, economist Stephan Klasen has demonstrated the potent impact that empowering girls through education has on growth: By increasing the educated individual's options in the work force, it increases their productivity and thus contributes to growth. Moreover, these benefits extend into the future: Educated women have fewer, and healthier, babies, and they are more likely to raise them to become educated and productive citizens like themselves – creating a healthier, more stable society.

Gene Sperling and Barbara Herz of the Council on Foreign Relations go even further, linking girls' education to social development gains in women's health, sustainable families, overall political participation and disease prevention. (For more on Klasen, Sperling and Herz, see 'Dig Deeper', page 12.)

Their work has been pivotal but was by no means alone in making the social and economic cases for gender equality in education. They were, in fact, building on a strong lineage of scholarly work that has complemented the rights-based community's commitment to universal education. A groundbreaking 1998 study by Sonalde Desai and Soumya Alva, sociologists in the field of demography, linked the educational attainment of mothers with key health indicators of their children (taken from data in 22 developing countries). Annabette Wils and Ann Goujon studied school enrolment trends, gender and the labour force across six regions from 1960 to 1990, demonstrating a link between education and economic attainment among women. In 2000, Benedicta Egbo, an education specialist at the University of Windsor, published *Gender, Literacy and Life Chances in Sub-Saharan Africa*, which showed how literacy positively affected women's place in society and power in the household.

These works were offset by a spate of microstudies on girls' and women's educational experiences, many of which were collected in the 1999 volume *Gender, Education and Development: Beyond Access to Empowerment*, edited by Christine Heward and Sheila

Bunwaree, with contributions on Ethiopia, Malaysia, Mauritius, Nepal, Niger, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Peru, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Tanzania. Piece by piece of precious evidence, academic research across a variety of disciplines has provided critical ballast to our understanding that educating girls is more than a question of rights; it is also one of the most powerful tools for social development at the world's disposal.

Potent functionalist arguments for girls' education, often from a pro-growth perspective, need to be viewed as a complement to the rights-based approach. While the right to education is absolute, not contingent on the degree to which the promotion of human rights enables or disables economic growth, a considerable body of scholarly evidence supports the notion that in the case of girls' right to education and the empowerment of women, growth and rights are mutually reinforcing. Human rights advocates need demonstrable

BRAZIL: Three girls stand together at the Centre of Educational and Professional Support for Racial and Gender Equality in Salvador, an NGO empowering black youth to confront racism, gender discrimination and sexual violence, and advocating for equal education and work opportunities in the community.



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functionalist arguments to appeal most broadly to an ideologically diverse public. Neither a cold scholarly calculus nor a moral appeal alone will likely prove sufficient to inspire donors, governments and civil society to educate and empower girls in developing countries to reach their fullest potential. But when both arguments are marshalled on behalf of education and gender equality, girls have a fighting chance. ♦

NOTES

1 All statistics in this section are from *State of the World's Children 2007*, Table 5: Education, page 121.

2 See UNICEF Education Strategy, E/ICEF/2007/10, May 2007.

The material under review represents some of the more useful recent work in the burgeoning literature on gender, education and development. It falls into three categories: foundational, expansive and stock-taking. These works trace the recent dialogue between scholars and development practitioners under the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) rubric. What all this work shares is a commitment to a world in which girls are educated, empowered and able to make the kinds of social contributions – from household decisions on health and education to broader social and economic participation – that can be called transformative. (Note: Many of these resources may be downloaded in full or in part at www.ungei.org/resources/index.html.)

THE FOUNDATIONAL WORK

In making the economic and social development case for the empowerment of women through girls' education, Stephan Klasen's 2002 article for the *World Bank Economic Review* and the work of Sperling and Herz in 2004 are fundamental scholarly statements. Klasen's original economic research and Sperling and Herz's synthesis have helped define current thinking on education and gender equality. The 2005 joint report by the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNICEF's *Gender Achievements and Prospects in Education: The GAP Report, Part One* offer scholars significant data, as well as country and regional case studies. Taken as a whole, these four documents sum up more than a decade's work on gender, education and development, from the birth of the Education for All movement in 1990 through the MDGs, and they lay a foundation for further inquiry.

Klasen, Stephan, 'Low Schooling for Girls, Slower Growth for All? Cross-country evidence on the effect of gender inequality in education on economic development', *World Bank Economic Review*, vol. 16, no. 3, December 2002, pp. 345–373

This article and Klasen's subsequent work on the subject provide a comprehensive argument for linking the education of girls with improvements across a wide range of social development indices. Using cross-country and panel regressions, Klasen builds as airtight a case as possible for Kofi Annan's famous statement that "there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women." Examining the effects of gender inequality in education on long-term economic growth, Klasen concludes that such inequality has a direct, measurable impact on growth because it lowers the average level of human capital; further, gender inequality fosters higher population growth and, hence, lowers annual per capita growth rates.

Herz, Barbara, and Gene B. Sperling, *What Works in Girls' Education: Evidence and policy from the*

***developing world*, Council On Foreign Relations, New York, 2004, 103 pages**

Council member Herz, who in the 1980s launched the Women in Development division of the World Bank, and Sperling, the director of the Center for Universal Education at the Council on Foreign Relations also contend that investments in girls' education promote economic growth. But they go further than Klasen in linking girls' education to gains in women's health, sustainable families, overall political participation and disease prevention. After adducing convincing evidence for these claims, the authors join the call for governments to create comprehensive education plans and ensure that political leaders prioritize education and marshal the resources to do the job.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNICEF, *Children Out of School: Measuring exclusion from primary education*, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Montreal, 2005, 115 pages

If Klasen's laid the scholarly groundwork for advocacy by linking growth to gender equality, this joint report from UNESCO and UNICEF arms advocates, teachers and scholars with a veritable arsenal of gender and education data to amplify Klasen's arguments and to measure progress. UNESCO and UNICEF pioneer in complementing official enrolment data with data from household surveys, yielding more accurate but less heartening results. With an eye on MDGs 2 and 3, the report enumerates the overall obstacles on the road to 2015 and the demographic details: 115 million primary-school-age children out of school, 61.6 million out-of-school girls, or 53 per cent of the total number; and 45 million children out of school in sub-Saharan Africa, another 42 million in South Asia. The report calls for a more nuanced and disaggregated approach to measurement to enable more robust and better targeted policy; it also presents data about learning outcomes side by side with enrolment data as a way of painting a more complete picture of where the world stands – and how far it needs to go.

United Nations Children's Fund, *Gender Achievements and Prospects in Education: The GAP report, part one*, New York, 2005, 100 pages

The *GAP Report* examines why the benchmark of gender parity in education by 2005 was not met and highlights innovations to help ensure that all children are in school by 2015. Regional surveys focus on the differences and commonalities characterizing the struggle for basic education and gender equality across regions. The report was the first step in an ongoing evaluation of progress, part of UNICEF's contribution as the lead agency of UNGEI.

THE EXPANSIVE TURN

Aikman and Unterhalter's edited volume *Beyond Access* accepts the premises of empowerment but goes

significantly further in defining what gender mainstreaming in the education sector should entail to spark genuine empowerment. As a policy work, *Beyond Access* is a bracing tonic for governments and development partners who assume that bolstering enrolment numbers is tantamount to empowerment. Lewis and Lockheed further challenge policymakers to confront that it is not gender alone but the confluence of gender and minority status – be it ethnic, religious, linguistic or racial – that keeps a significant percentage of the female population out of school. Then, too, Rihani's emphasis on building (or 'unbreaking') the bridge to secondary education for girls uses both data and field work to argue that true empowerment of girls – and the social transformation that Klasen, Herz and Sperling say accompanies it – cannot be reached if primary education remains the sole policy focus. Rather, Rihani suggests it is secondary education that signals a society's true commitment to making girls and women full partners in social development and daily life.

Aikman, Sheila, and Elaine Unterhalter, editors, *Beyond Access: Transforming policy and practice for gender equality in education*, Oxfam GB, Oxford, 2005, 263 pages

The contributors diagnose the causes of high primary drop-out rates among girls in developing countries, arguing that governments must move beyond pledges to increase girls' access to school. They prescribe policy for retention and advancement to secondary school, presenting a vision of empowerment that can transform girls' lives – and their societies. The articles analyse causes and extent of gender inequality in education; government policies and their implications for women's empowerment; and report on original fieldwork in a range of locales where gender-equality initiatives have flourished. The tone and scope of this book position it at the intersection of advanced scholarship, advocacy and undergraduate or graduate teaching; and its blend of case studies and abstraction gives it a wide utility.

Lewis, Maureen, and Marlaine E. Lockheed, *Inexcusable Absence: Why 60 million girls still aren't in school and what to do about it*, Center for Global Development, Washington, D.C., February 2007, 180 pages

A key challenge in achieving gender equality in education is reaching those girls who remain out of school even in countries where school campaigns have led to significant gains in enrolment. This well-researched book approaches this problem by focusing not only on gender but on minority status as well. Complicating notions of access, Lewis and Lockheed emphasize the determinant role minority status plays in keeping the school gates closed to many girls. Indeed, nearly three-quarters of the 60 million girls still not in school belong to ethnic, religious, linguistic, racial or other minorities, compounding often considerable gender barriers. The authors' exhaustive research leaves little doubt that

these "doubly disadvantaged" children must be the focus of education policy if the MDGs on basic education and gender equality are to be attained. They call for gender-disaggregated data (an emphasis of UNICEF's work on gender and education) as a tool for mainstreaming, and they urge governments and education partners to integrate strategies to make education more responsive not only to girls but to minorities as well.

Rihani, May A., *Keeping the Promise: Five benefits of girls' secondary education*, Academy for Educational Development, Washington, D.C., 2006, 78 pages

While Aikman and Unterhalter's work moves beyond access in advocating for educational reform, Rihani goes past primary school to discuss the impact of girls' secondary education on a variety of development indicators. One benefit, perhaps surprisingly, is the role that a robust secondary education sector for girls plays in encouraging girls' primary education. Rihani argues that accessible, gender-sensitive secondary schools encourage parental and community involvement in girls' primary school experiences, bolstering retention and completion and building a bridge to secondary and higher education. She argues strongly for the positive impact on women's and community health accompanying girls' secondary education.

TAKING STOCK

United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Girls' right to education*, Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Mr. V. Muñoz Villalobos, 2006, 25 pages

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2007*, United Nations, New York, 2007, 21 pages.

Finally, we return to the question of where the international community stands on the treacherous road to 2015. Last year, the Special Rapporteur to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights submitted a report seeking to ground the discussion of gender and education in the soil of human rights. The report decries a tendency among governments, donors and policymakers to think of education as an optional 'service', as opposed to an inalienable right, and reminds us that a rights-based approach is essential in advocating for gender equality in education. Then, this summer the official UN assessment of progress on the MDG agenda was released; for those seeking updated information and analysis on the current state of progress towards all the Millennium Development Goals, the June 2007 report will be an invaluable teaching tool or research companion. The latest data note some progress but many problems still to overcome if we are to wake up in 2015 to a world where girls never have to experience the kind of discrimination that sentences them to a life less free, less healthy or less safe than that of their male peers – in short, a life less powerful. ❖

CU and ICTJ explore oral history, human rights

The Columbia University Oral History Research Office held its annual two-week international Summer Institute in Oral History 11–22 June 2007, co-sponsored by the International Center for Transitional Justice, an organization that assists countries in pursuing accountability for human rights abuses. Faculty and fellows from around the world considered the theme 'Telling the World: Oral history, struggles for justice and human rights dialogues'. "Oral historians can play a very significant role within human rights movements, and before and after Truth Commissions, through capturing the realities of human rights violations as they are experienced emotionally, physically, politically and historically," said Mary Marshall Clark, director of the Oral History Research Office. "As we discovered in this year's Institute, oral history can both measure the cost of suffering individually and document the long-term impact of atrocity globally. The goal of 'telling the world' in this way is to encourage corrective action."

Upcoming Conferences

14–16 November 2007: International Conference on School Education, Pluralism and Marginality; New Delhi.

Hosted by the Deshkal Society in association with the Council for Social Development and the Asian Development Research Institute, this conference will address such themes as 'Caste, Class, Race, Gender and Classroom' 'Home, School and Community'; and 'Knowledge of the Oppressed, Power and School'. The conference will broadly consider the tension between two competing streams of discourse: the role of education in nation-building and the preservation of marginalized cultural identities through the education sector. See <http://www.deshkalindia.com/conference/> for more information.

17–19 July 2008: Paris International Conference on Education, Economy & Society; Paris.

This conference is intended to be a forum for discussion and networking for researchers, administrators, policymakers, industry representatives and other professionals interested in education. Practitioners from all areas of education are invited, and the content will include economic, political, cultural and social themes relating to education. The languages of the conference will be English and French. The submissions deadline is 10 October 2007, with acceptance notification by 1 November 2007. For information and registration: <http://education-conferences.org/default.aspx>

UN Events

World Teachers' Day, 5 October 2007, will provide an opportunity for the international public to examine

the critically important contributions teachers make, both inside and outside the classroom. On this day, thousands of education professionals around the world will unite to ensure that the needs of future generations of schoolchildren are taken into account. World Teachers' Day 2007 focuses on the need for bringing qualified teachers into classrooms and for offering teachers the necessary support – financial, intellectual and social – to attain the objectives of Education for All by 2015. Millions of new teachers will need to be recruited and trained to reach this goal. More than 100 countries will observe World Teachers' Day, and events are being planned through the efforts of Education International, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other partners. World Teachers' Day invites everyone to recognize the indispensable and often difficult work that teachers' perform – whether in an industrialized city or a temporary classroom in a refugee camp. For information visit http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=41860&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

11–13 December 2007: Seventh High-Level Group Meeting of the Education for All (EFA) Movement, Dakar.

This year marks the seventh time the EFA group has gathered to discuss progress and challenges to reaching the education goals set in 2000. UNESCO leads the global Education for All movement, aiming to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015. To learn more about EFA and the 2007 High-level Meeting: http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=47044&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Calls for Papers

The *Journal of Education for International Development* is soliciting papers on the themes for two upcoming issues.

Education Services in Fragile States: Manuscripts should address education projects and programmes working with fragile populations or in conflict and post-conflict settings. To be considered for this issue, manuscripts must be received by 24 September 2007.

Assessment: Papers should address how developing countries (both governments and projects) assess student learning outcomes. Manuscripts on **Evaluation** will also be considered and should address the theoretical and practical questions of programme and project evaluations, their implications and use. Manuscripts must be received no later than 12 November 2007. Submission guidelines are available at <http://www.equip123.net/JEID/submit.htm>. ❖



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OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY: Hoda Al-Ajori stands at a shrapnel-riddled wall inside her destroyed home in Gaza.

Continued from page 5

direct bearing on access to schooling, attendance and levels of achievement. Particularly in politically volatile settings, formal schooling may involve various risks for girls and boys. Experience has taught me that adults, including parents, are not always fully aware of those risks. We can only hope to create safe, inclusive schools by engaging thoroughly with young people directly."

How did Hart arrive at this conviction that we begin to formulate effective policy in conflict situations only by listening more attentively to what children are saying? "Working in the West Bank as a teacher in 1993, I had the privilege of learning from my young students about their experiences of the first Intifada." Hart was struck by the disjuncture between the way his students spoke about their involvement and what was written in their name. "The bulk of the literature about the Intifada at that time principally spoke about children in terms of their traumatization – as evaluated by mental health experts – with virtually no discussion of their experience. I came to believe how important it is for us to understand that kind of extraordinary experience in order to know how best to support young people in the midst of conflict and how to ensure that the transition out of conflict embraces their needs and aspirations."

Hart's experiences have also taught him not to assume that gender functions the same way in every context, a perspective he sees as crucial in addressing gender-specific needs. "What is vital, in my view, is to ensure that all of us who work in conflict and post-conflict

settings are attentive to the particular challenges faced by girls in each place we find ourselves. Moreover, even in a single location, we cannot assume that all girls will struggle equally with a particular issue, for example, early forced marriage. Factors of social class/caste, economic standing, ethnicity, birth order and so on will all contribute to shaping the challenges and opportunities faced by girls (and boys!)."

The nagging question remains: If we abandon universal notions of childhood and stop prioritizing certain aspects of gendered experience, are we ceding the terrain of children's lives to the violence from which we ultimately want to protect them? Are we perhaps abdicating our responsibility to work towards some standard for children? In the end, Hart has a sobering but vitally important message that must be reckoned with in a world where children are increasingly drawn into violent conflict:

"I would express concern," says Hart, "that the current enthusiasm to listen to children's voices should avoid the danger of only listening to those voices that tell us more or less what we want to hear, thereby validating a course of action that was pretty well decided in advance. The real challenge for us all is to create the opportunities and have the courage to listen to the voices of children who, for example, don't see the value of schooling, or who don't share our vision of peace and coexistence. Their views are certainly as important to our understanding of a situation as those of children who are well disposed to our values." ❖



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The border crossing near the town of Rafah in southern Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territory: Palestinians displaced by the recent violence wait for permission to cross into Egypt in cars and on foot. As this girl prepares to leave her homeland, a world of experience that belies her years seems to be reflected in her eyes.

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