

## Innovative conference to look at how far we have come on equality

Elaine Unterhalter



Young women in Guatemala demonstrate in 2005 their demands that education is needed to end poverty

*E4: Engendering Empowerment: Education and Equality* will be an innovative conference for education activists, academics, practitioners, policy makers and girls themselves from many countries of the world, held under the auspices of UNGEI (United Nations Girls' Education Initiative). E4 will take place in April and May 2010 using electronic media (the E-conference) and participatory discussion in Dakar, Senegal (the D-conference). UNGEI initiated the idea of the conference to mark ten years since the organisation was launched at the Education for All (EFA) conference in Dakar in 2000. UNGEI aims to use the conference deliberations as a means to assess how far we have come since 2000 and what significant challenges remain.

E4 adds to the momentum building up for enhanced support globally for gender equality and women's rights, as expressed over the last six months in many electronic and face-to-face discussions reviewing progress since the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted in 1995. These discussions positioned education as a key strategic objective. 'We can be proud but not complacent', said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon at the International Women's Day Observance in New York in March 2010. The assessment is as apt with regard to education as it is in many other areas that bear on women's rights and the question of equality.

### How much progress?

In 2010 data collected by UNESCO's Global Monitoring Report team indicate that two thirds of the one billion people worldwide who have had no schooling, or left school after less than four years, are women and

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girls. Women make up two thirds of the estimated 759 million illiterate youths and adults worldwide. Girls with little schooling come overwhelmingly from the poorest communities in any country and from countries with long histories of conflict. In many countries, children may enrol in school, but are not able to attend regularly, progress to the end of a primary cycle let alone the secondary phase, or learn much of value. In a number of countries girls make up a large proportion of children for whom schooling is an often interrupted aspiration.

Nonetheless significant achievements in expanding access to schooling have been made since 2000.

Many countries have achieved enormous improvements in gender parity in enrolment and attendance. Yet, even in countries with huge improvements in gender parity of enrolment rates, these amount to a fraction of all children who should be enrolled, and there are often huge disparities between regions and wealth quintiles. In 2009, 40 countries, with the largest complement being in Africa, were considered unlikely to meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of gender parity in primary school enrolments. Fifty countries still have such large disparities in enrolments in favour of boys that they are unlikely to achieve gender parity in secondary education by 2015. Improvements in enrolments are set alongside the need for addressing intersecting inequalities associated with wealth, or the lack of infrastructure in rural areas, which particularly affect girls. Sub-national and socio-economic analysis of attainment data shows marked gender gaps in school quality, highlighting difficulties children may encounter in taking learning of value from schooling.

The UNGEI Secretariat has high aspirations for the conference:

"Through the E4 conference, UNGEI aims to strengthen and expand partnerships for girls' education to ensure that all children – girls and boys – have the quality education that is their right. We will be examining issues of violence, poverty and educational quality and their intersections with participation, climate change and health, in order to reverse current trends that show some 56 million children – over half of whom would be girls – could still be out of school in 2015."

Cheryl Gregory Faye  
Head of the UNGEI Secretariat

## Partnerships

UNGEI is one of a number of partnerships which have formed to address gender inequalities in schooling over the last ten years. The Beijing Platform for Action of 1995 gave prominence to the need for expanding provision of education for girls and women as a means to challenge discrimination and injustice, and engaged a wide range of governments, multilateral organisations and women's groups to support this. The EFA Framework for Action agreed at Dakar in 2000 by 164 governments and a number of civil society organisations included a gender goal. This has ensured annual monitoring of progress by governments and education

activists. The goals and targets associated with the MDGs in 2000 also gave prominence to aspects of education and women's rights. This is evident

in targets on achieving universal primary education (MDG2), attending to gender parity at all phases of education and considering aspects of women's employment and participation in decision-making (MDG3), and preventing maternal mortality (MDG5). The UN and its member governments have reviewed progress on the MDGs and EFA, and in a number of countries partnerships have formed across national boundaries to promote gender equality and women's rights in and through education.

Yet, despite some notable achievements in expanding access, many partnerships set up since 2000 have had difficulties in reaching the poorest quintiles, and ensuring quality and equity in post-primary transfer and provision. Some of the reasons for this relate to inadequate resources and limited political commitment to make gender equality in education go more deeply than a question of enrolment in school. Other reasons are linked to the complex web of inequalities associated with poverty, climate change, conflict, and inadequate distribution of resources for nutrition, water, health and HIV. Violence against women and girls, often unmentioned upon and accepted as normal, is also known to be implicated in difficulties girls have in accessing or continuing school. These problems are amplified by difficulties of maintaining connections between sometimes very different constituencies engaged in partnerships and action for gender equality and education. Thus partnerships have yielded important results, opened space for dialogue and built significant connections, but they still face many challenges: some relating to the environment in which they are working and some to internal dynamics.



Credit: UNICEF/NYHQ2005-1379.Roger LeMoyné

A Beirut schoolgirl and her classmates at their school

## Spaces of power and exclusion

Worldwide concern with expanding access to education has increased at a time when inequalities within and between countries are growing. Thus disquiet at forms of gender inequality in education struggle to find their place alongside everyday realities of hunger, unemployment, and lack of adequate conditions for livelihood or health. In the words of a South African head teacher, interviewed in 2008 by researchers working on the *Gender, education and global poverty reduction initiatives* research project, the goals for EFA and the MDGs are 'heard a long way off'. What makes for this distance and what makes it so easy for gender issues to drop off agendas for developing education?

One reason is associated with the complexity of gendered power in local settings. The development of schooling and orientation to gender equality requires organisation and clear-sighted work over decades. Considerable insight into social and educational conditions that might maintain gender inequalities despite an expansion of access, are needed. Often limited action, for example, free books for girls can fail to translate into institutionalised arrangements to secure gender equality in curriculum, language of instruction, teacher training, pedagogies in use, or management. Attention to gender in all these areas is necessary. But adequate levels of professional knowledge and support for practice may not be available. Sometimes, if they exist, they may be frustrated because of long-established gender hierarchies.

Often the way in which gender is overlooked goes unremarked. Gender budgeting is a technique which requires education budgets and aid flows to be scrutinised so that the level and form of

service delivery to girls and boys or men and women is kept under constant review. The UNESCO Global Monitoring Reports since 2000 document that money promised in 2000 to support EFA has not flowed quickly or efficiently enough, and has not adequately reached the lowest quintile or privileged the gender equality aspects of quality.

Another reason gender is not dealt with in sufficient depth is linked with the way in which one form of inequality shapes another. Government social policy and the campaigning work of NGOs often fail to give adequate attention to the connections between family livelihood, health, and gender equality. The recognition that school was an important site to provide some of the education that could protect against the spread of HIV led to considerable concern with 'joined up' planning in thinking about gender and schooling, but very few countries gave sufficient attention to gender in their education and HIV plans. Thus long histories of gender inequality in many different social, economic political and cultural realms cannot be changed overnight. But we also have many instances where changes that support greater gender equity are beginning to be instituted.

However institutional change is not the only vehicle through which to bring about greater equality. The actions of parents, teachers, managers and activists are also of enormous significance. One important area that is gaining greater acknowledgement relates to the harm and injustice associated with gender-based violence. Greater attention needs to be given to the impact of violence against girls upon their education and the ways in which education can give girls and women resources to challenge gender-based violence.

#### **Partnerships for equality: the promise of participation**

From 1995 partnerships for gender equality in education have been a key element in strategies to support education rights and capabilities. But the difficulties of sustaining partnerships and enhancing work on gender

equality cannot be overlooked. Enhancing different forms of participation within partnerships will be a challenge in the coming decade. The Beijing Platform for Action identified gender mainstreaming as a key approach to secure this. The MDG targets highlight the

importance of including women in decision making at all levels of policy and practice. But often governments do not sufficiently consult women's organisations. Gender mainstreaming can be undertaken as a means of enhancing participatory discussions within education, reflecting on questions of power and the nature of the articulation of education and other social policy areas. When done in this way, rather than as a technical bureaucratic exercise, gender mainstreaming may offer considerable potential to expose and change some of the hierarchies and forms of subordination that have made delivering quality of education and redressing violence so difficult.

Including women in decision-making at all levels of policy and practice has the potential to end practices of exclusion and silencing. The potential offered by civil society organisations that campaign on education and women's rights for enhancing participation in work to support girls' education and gender equality is considerable. It is important to engage with governments to build

#### **Greater attention needs to be given to the ways in which education can give girls and women resources to challenge gender-based violence**

partnerships that are concerned to keep substantive gender equality under review, offering spaces of participation to the most marginalized, and highlighting particularly important social reform in areas, such as post-conflict, HIV or climate change.

There are still major obstacles in realising rights to education, in education, and through education for many millions. Nonetheless enormously creative and diverse initiatives are underway, despite the harshness of the present moment, so marked by inequality, conflict, and threats associated with climate change and economic recession. The E4 conferences aim to enhance this process and build conditions in which we work together to move forward with realising a widely shared vision for gender equality in schooling and equitable outcomes for girls and women. Working for gender equality, empowerment and women's rights though schooling is an enormous, but rewarding, challenge. We cannot underestimate the power of what we can do in and through education. It is a hugely rich environment from which ideas about equality have grown and will continue to flourish.

*This article draws on 'Partnership, participation and power for gender equality in education, a Situation Analysis' prepared for the E4 Conference by Elaine Unterhalter. The full version of the document can be downloaded at <http://www.e4conference.org>*

## **The e-conference**

The e-conference will take place in the 5 weeks (April 12-26) preceding the face-to-face conference in Dakar. It aims to open up the discussion and allow the broadest possible participation in the E4 initiative. The e-conference seeks to bring together a wide range of teachers, pupils, activists and academics: registration is open to all.

Each week will focus on one of the themes emerging from the situation analysis. Specially commissioned papers will be posted each week. Facilitators will open each week with an introductory one-hour session on Elluminate audio-graphical conferencing and will guide discussions over the week. A report summarising the e-conference will be published and made available on-line and presented at the conference in Dakar.

**April 12th – 26th** *Poverty, intersecting inequalities and girls' rights to education*

**April 19th – 23rd** *Quality education for gender equality*

**April 26th – 30th** *Breaking the silence: contesting violence and girls' education*

**May 3rd – 7th** *Connecting social policy: climate change, health, AIDS and girls' education*

**May 10th – 14th** *Convergence week*

To participate in the e-conference please go to [www.e4conference.org/e4e](http://www.e4conference.org/e4e)

**WE LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING FROM YOU.**

Major issues that cut across the ways in which we understand participation for gender equality concern:

- the interconnection of education, health, water, nutrition and HIV
- the effects of climate change
- mobilisation to combat violence
- the intersection of poverty and other inequalities
- sustaining quality schooling and rights through education



# Pushing boundaries: Internet takes UNGEI E4 conference from local to global

Lucy Hatfield

The *Engendering Empowerment: Education and Equality* E4 conference aims to engage a very wide range of people to address why, according to the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2010, almost 39 million girls are out of school. The E4 conference has harnessed the Internet through an e-conference which will allow for more depth of discussion and circulation of a wide range of papers. It has also connected with the online community and social networking sites to promote an extensive discussion about the themes of the conference.

Through Facebook and Twitter social networking sites, which allow for the exchange of personal stories, videos and views, a new platform for learning and discussion has been established. Through these sites a forum has been built for advocates of girls' education to share views, experiences and interesting articles. Using social networking tools has opened participation in this debate to people outside of NGOs and government bodies, who work professionally in this area. This new range of participants has generated a vibrant, inclusive and interactive dialogue for all those involved.

## Are you passionate about girls' education and want to get involved in the debate and make your voice heard?

E4's network of campaigners is growing rapidly and people are engaging in the discussion from all over the world and from all walks of life. Two months after the site launched just over 100 people were following us on Twitter, almost 200 became fans on Facebook and 37 people joined our Facebook group to engage further. Eight per cent of all visits on the main conference information site (<http://www.e4conference.org/>) were being generated from Facebook and Twitter users. Thoughts that people have been sharing with us and the Twitter community on our e-campaign have been very encouraging, for example: 'Reading a report on girls' education from e4conf, and the cover image is just so wonderful & motivating'.

The discussion agenda on Facebook and Twitter is set by participants themselves who are free to lead the debate and raise issues that are important to them. Discussions are topical, with participants commenting on a range of issues such as cultural practices which

stand as a barrier to girls' education, and how these could be reconciled. Discussion focused on child marriages and FGM drew upon participants' personal experiences from contexts as varied as Ethiopia and Yemen. To give a flavour of the discussion:

***'Ethiopia: 'Child marriage stands as a major factor for girls dropping out of school early'.***

***'Supermodel Waris Dirie talks about her experience of FGM & child marriage.'***

***'Egypt: 72 percent of girls aged 15+ undergo FGC every year'.***

***'Almost half the adult women in South Asia can't read or write, women lack economic & political power.'***

A powerful quote tweeted starkly summarises the importance of education:

***'Education can mean life or death. Queen Rania'.***

Current events have excited dynamic conversations. Following the devastating earthquake in Haiti, the question of whether education should feature as an essential relief component and what some of the gender effects of disasters were was discussed. International Women's Day on 8th March marked a particularly memorable day in E4 conference's Twitter calendar, and saw thousands using our site to tweet on the importance of girls' and women's education as a tool for empowerment and for realising gender equality. For example:

***'Celebrating 100yrs of Intl Women's Day! Still so much2do for young women worldwide-let's hope doesn't take another 100 years'***

***'Women do two-thirds of the world's work but receive only 10% of the world's income'***

***'Today on International Women's Day let's raise***

***awareness of the shocking issue of gendercide where girl babies don't count'***

***'Important to have a day when we can stand together as women and commit to helping other women less fortunate-Sarah Brown'***

***'Celebrating International Women's Day & envisioning a world where girls are celebrated & empowered to live out their full potential!'***

One tweeter used an eloquent quote to bring education to the heart of the debate:

***'Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world – Nelson Mandela'.***

**Join the debate! 'Tweeters' can follow e4conf on Twitter. Facebook fanatics can become a fan of e4conf or join the Facebook group, e4conf: Putting girls' education on the global agenda.**

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# Partnering to Stop Violence Against Girls

Jenny Parkes and Asmara Figue

Recent years have seen a massive expansion in girls' access to school, but many girls find that the quality of education they receive is far from being delivered in a way that promotes either their human dignity or development of their potential. In many contexts, under-resourced and over-crowded classrooms, poorly-trained or untrained teachers, bullying, insults, physical punishment and incidents of sexual harassment and abuse both in and on the way to school are everyday realities. Often these prevent those girls who do go to school from benefiting from their rights to and in education.

In 2008, seeking to combat violence and to tackle the inequalities that expose girls to violence in and around schools ActionAid initiated a 5-year multi-country project called Stop Violence Against Girls in School. Supported by the UK's Big Lottery Fund, the project is being implemented in Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique. It aims to empower girls to enjoy their rights to education and participation in a violence-free environment. There are four objectives:

1. To develop legal and policy frameworks that specifically address violence against girls in school
2. To reduce rates of violence against girls by family members, teachers and peers
3. To increase girls' access to and retention in schools
4. To build girls' confidence to challenge violence in and around schools

In each country, working in collaboration with local partner organisations, the project combines research, advocacy and community-based initiatives. It aims to generate new knowledge and a better understanding about the causes and effects of violence against girls. Research is seen as key to tackling the inequalities which expose girls to violence.

## Baseline research

A baseline study has been carried out, in order to provide information to help identify challenges and measure the project's progress during its 5-year life-cycle. A team at the Institute of Education, University of London, has coordinated the design and implementation of the study in close collaboration with ActionAid and national research institutes in each country – Own & Associates in Kenya, the Faculty of Education of the University of Eduardo Mondlane in Mozambique and the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition

(GNECC) in Ghana. Girls and boys, parents, teachers, community leaders and women's group leaders, as well as many other stakeholders have participated in focus group discussions, interviews and surveys. The findings are currently being analysed and national research reports and a cross-country report will be published in mid-2010.

## Advocacy

A range of advocacy and community activities are simultaneously being implemented at local and national level.

Teams in each country have been working to change attitudes and practices that expose girls to violence and prevent them from getting an education. They train teachers and education authorities on issues such as child rights, gender equality and violence against girls and run awareness-raising activities with boys, parents and community leaders. Direct work with girls both in and out of school, via clubs, debates, workshops and forums have also helped build girls' confidence levels to speak out to decision-makers and the media about issues that concern them.

To achieve longer term change the teams have been focussing on policies and laws, identifying gaps and making recommendations for change and improvement. In Ghana for example, the Ministry of Education has invited the team to lead on the development of a Gender in Education policy that will specifically address the problem of violence against girls in school and stipulate measures to prevent its occurrence.



Women take part in community discussion about girls' education in Kenya



'Education is my right' – Girls' club members, Mozambique

## Challenges and lessons learned

In the first year of the project we have faced several challenges. A substantial amount of time is needed to build relationships, trust and shared understanding between the many partners in the project. Different ideas about the meaning of violence, gendered inequality and empowerment, have meant that time is needed for thought and discussion. Building relationships with schools and communities can also be complex, especially when we are addressing sensitive and taboo topics. Sometimes head teachers or community leaders have avoided talking about violence in their schools. Occasionally girls themselves have been reluctant to talk, fearing for their own safety. Practices, which ActionAid and the project partners view as violent, like whipping, beating or being harassed by boys, may be taken-for-granted as a normal part of everyday life, even by children themselves. In many cases, incidents of violence are not reported, either due to lack of awareness of, or access to, official mechanisms. Working to build links between communities, schools and agencies which provide child protection services has helped the teams to ensure cases are followed up appropriately and perpetrators are held to account.

As the project moves forward the baseline findings will enable country teams to better influence national laws and policies that specifically address the problem of violence in schools. They will also be used to facilitate the development of programmes and monitoring systems which aim to reduce the number of incidents of violence against girls and ensure they are able to enjoy their rights to education and participation in a violence free environment.

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# 'A teacher can make a difference' say teacher educators in Pakistan

Ambreen Pirbhai

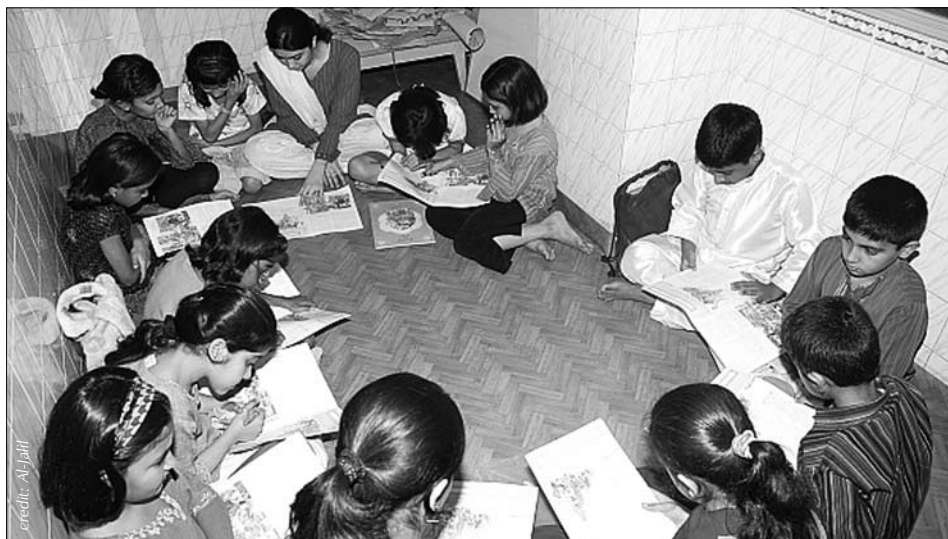
Through the drive for Education For All and the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals more children, including girls, now have access to primary education in many developing countries. Pakistan is one of these. However, in Pakistan, education has not contributed very much to empowering women or to establishing gender equality in society. Before going to school young girls and boys learn that a man is always superior to a woman and this idea is strongly reinforced through school text books and many teachers' own perceptions about acceptable gender roles in society.

As a Teacher Educator I often go for lesson observations in classrooms. Once I was observing a class where the teacher was teaching the topic Building the First Muslim Mosque. The teacher asked the class how they would have contributed if they were present at that time. Children gave a variety of responses. One girl said, 'I would cut the wood'. A picture in their textbook, however, showed a man cutting the wood. The teacher asked, 'Would you be able to cut the wood?' The girl immediately replied, 'No, I cannot because it is a heavy task'. Then teacher asked again, 'Who would be able to cut the wood?' She replied, 'Boys may perform this task'. Though this is just one observation it brings out two critical issues prevailing in our education system: textbooks and teachers are reinforcing gender inequalities in classrooms. If the picture had portrayed women cutting wood, or doing any other heavy task, the potential for learning would have been different. If the teacher had been sensitive to these issues, she would have appreciated and encouraged that girl, rather than making her believe that she was unable to do that job because she

is a girl. Often teachers, both male and female, regard female students as inferior compared to male students. Teachers

are themselves not aware that their gender beliefs are limiting the horizons of female students. Many teachers behave in a very gender-biased way, mostly due to their exposure to traditions and cultural norms. Teachers convey a sense that gender

**Before going to school young girls and boys learn that a man is always superior to a woman and this idea is strongly reinforced through school text books and many teachers' own perceptions about acceptable gender roles in society**



Primary Class in Pakistan

inequalities are appropriate to their students because they, themselves, are part of a male dominated society and have learned, or come to accept, gender inequalities.

Despite extensive gender inequalities outside and even inside the school a teacher can make a difference in the classroom through using gender-sensitive pedagogy. In this way any teacher can be an agent for change. Teachers generally get a free hand in teaching and learning activities in the classroom, so they have many opportunities to overcome gender inequalities, even if these are presented in textbooks. My experience of classroom observations also demonstrates the positive role a teacher can play even when textbooks contain gender biased content. For instance, a teacher was teaching the topic Muslim contributions in History: all the contributions mentioned in the textbook were associated with men.

During the discussion the teacher questioned why all the contributions described were men's – what had women been doing at that time? By asking these questions she led the class to a highly critical discussion, where they talked about some of the reasons for female absences from history, how they are contributing in the present world, and what role an individual can play to

empower women today. During the whole discussion students were very engaged with the debate, asking questions, arguing with each other. After observing the class I realised that if we cannot change textbooks in the near future nonetheless through gender-sensitive teacher training we can enhance teachers' capacity to teach lessons in a more gender-balanced way. Teachers could then support girls in schools to

expand their horizons, rather than limiting their worlds to domestic life. At the same time it is important to understand that single, short-term, event-based training on gender-responsive pedagogies are not sufficient to address deeply entrenched sexist beliefs and behaviours. However they might contribute to a process of change being put in motion.

Education is a significant means through which we can transform people's attitudes and behaviours with regard to gender equality. But just increasing the enrolment of girls in primary schools without attending to teachers or textbooks will not bring about social improvement or dignity for all human beings regardless of their gender.

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# Consider wider contexts of gender inequality says UNESCO's Beijing + 15 on-line discussion on Education and Training for Women

Keiko Nowacka

2010 marks the 15th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, and the landmark documents that resulted from it: the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This anniversary has sparked numerous events, research papers and debates on the many achievements – and challenges – since 1995 in the journey towards reaching the ambitious objectives set under the Beijing Platform for Action. This anniversary has given advocates of gender equality the opportunity to reflect on the work that is still left to do in order for those promises to be turned into reality for the world's women.

## The Online Discussion – background

The United Nations' Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) selected UNESCO to organize an online discussion on Strategy B of the Beijing Platform for Action on "Education and Training of Women", from 10 January to 7 February. This was one of a series of online discussions coordinated by IANWGE and WomenWatch on the 12 strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform.

### Section B of the Beijing Platform for Action: Education and Training

1. Ensure equal access to education
2. Eradicate illiteracy among women
3. Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education
4. Develop non-discriminatory education and training
5. Allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms
6. Promote life-long education and training for girls and women

Source: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/educa.htm>

## Disconnections, Silences and Crises

To push the boundaries of existing discourses on gender equality in education, we framed the discussion around three themes that would bring to the fore the key issues related to Strategic Objective B. A concept note *Gender Equality and Women and Girls' Education, 1995-2010: How much is there a space for hope?* by Elaine Unterhalter, Amy North and Jenny Parkes at the Institute for Education provided the framework to situate the discussion's main interests and questions:

### Week 1 (10-16 January 2010) –

*Disconnections: missed opportunities for progress and lessons learned*

### Week 2 (17-23 January 2010) –

*Silences and hidden challenges*

### Week 3 (24-30 January 2010) –

*Crises: challenges and new opportunities.*

During **Week 4** (31 January-7 February 2010), in addition to an overview of the three themes, participants were invited to give 5 key messages on gender equality in education and training that they wanted to share with decision-makers and governments.

## Participant Profiles

The discussion generated immediate interest from a wide range of stakeholders. By the end of the discussion a total of 457 women and men, from all regions of the world, were registered. Language offered no barriers to the dynamic exchanges, with participants responding to each others' questions and contributions in French, English and Spanish. An online survey conducted at the end of the discussion captured the diversity of participant profiles. 81 percent of participants were women; the majority of participants (40 percent) were aged between 36-55 years, 34 percent aged above 55 years, 23 percent aged between 25-35 years, and 3 percent were under 25 years. The discussions drew participants from the US and Canada (approximately 25 percent and 10 percent respectively), France (9 percent), and Nigeria (nearly 8 percent); and in smaller numbers from Pakistan, Australia, Argentina, India, South Africa, Brazil and Bangladesh. The diverse geographical and cultural profile of participants ensured a particularly stimulating exchange of ideas and experiences.

## Specialist Contributions

The online debate was enriched by key contributions from specialists in the fields of gender and education. This included the UNESCO Institute for Statistics' (UIS) paper on "Gender Disaggregated Key Education Indicators since Beijing 1995"; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning's (UIL) analysis of female literacy in their paper, "Ensuring Equitable Lifelong Learning Opportunities"; and the EFA Global Monitoring Report team's gender analysis of this year's report focusing on "Reaching the marginalized".

## Key Messages

Preliminary conclusions are available on UNESCO's "Gender Equality" website ([www.unesco.org/genderequality](http://www.unesco.org/genderequality)) and also the WomenWatch website ([www.un.org.womenwatch/](http://www.un.org.womenwatch/)). Some key messages for decision-makers include:

- Greater opportunities for participation by grassroots organisations in national policy development were required to translate commitments into effective local action and coordinate implementation;
- Governments need to be more accountable and transparent;
- Governments need to consider wider contexts of gender inequality;
- Gender equality can only be achieved through a holistic approach that includes boys and men in all interventions;
- Media content, pedagogical materials and cultural traditions that perpetuate stereotypes of "feminine" subjects and professions need to be reformed in order to reflect more progressive social roles for women;
- Training programmes need to better equip women to face and surmount crises.

## An ongoing debate

Due to the success of the discussion, numerous participants expressed the wish to see the discussion prolonged, valuing dialogue between women and men from all horizons. In view of this strong request, UNESCO's Division for Gender Equality has extended the online discussion up until the High-level Event by the United Nations General Assembly on the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals in September 2010. The next phase of the online discussion will broaden the original focus of the debate to look at transformative policies, practices and initiatives that promote gender equality in all spheres of life.

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# Talking with Teachers

## Broaching discussion about FGM in Tanzania

Charlotte Nussey

As a teacher I have two identities. In London I work in a large, fee-paying secondary school, in the Maasailand in Tanzania I worked for three months in a small, rural secondary school. I have returned to Tanzania a number of times since. Moving between these two identities has offered space to think about how to open up discussions of sensitive issues about gender and custom.

*Unanswered Cries*, by Osman Conteh, from Sierra Leone, is part of the English National Curriculum for secondary students in Tanzania, and was written for teenagers. It won a Macmillan prize for African literature in 2002, and explores the sensitive tradition of female circumcision, or Female Genital Mutilation as it is also known, from the perspective of a girl called Olabisi. Aged fourteen, Olabisi travels from the city to visit her mother in the village, but runs home to her father when her mother attempts to have her circumcised as part of the bondo ceremony, a ritual cutting performed upon women by women. The ceremony is explored through the views of characters in the book. Yah Posseh, the head circumciser, highlights the aspects of the ceremony which prepare girls for womanhood; a way to learn 'the collective and accumulated wisdom' of their 'foremothers'. But Olabisi is terrified, particularly when she witnesses the ritual being performed on another girl. A doctor in court presents the opposite view to Yah Posseh when she highlights the medical risks of the ceremony. The judge rules that the wishes of the child should be respected, while calling for more dialogue between both groups for better understanding.

Teaching the book to Form Four secondary students in Tanzania encouraged me to think about the role of education for improving equality within society. While discussing features of the main character in small groups, I asked one of my students what she felt about circumcision. She told me that for Olabisi it was wrong, because she didn't want it done. I asked if she thought that it was important that girls should be able to choose and she said 'yes'. So I asked her whether she thought it was important that she herself had a choice. She couldn't answer. I felt that I had pushed the discussion too far. Perhaps she was not ready to apply her thoughts about Olabisi to her own life.

In 2009, I organised a visit to Tanzania for my London students. In an after dinner conversation, our guide, who was Maasai, raised the topic of female circumcision, using the more politically loaded term FGM. He spoke eloquently in informed and thoughtful terms about dangers for the health of women, and the pain involved. He also spoke about the importance of elders for the Maasai, and how, for them, circumcision is a vital rite of passage for both boys and girls. When one of the London students asked whether he would ever marry an uncircumcised woman, he laughed, and kept laughing. "An uncircumcised woman is not a woman", he finally said.

Our discussion with our guide highlighted that change cannot be brought about without the consensus of both men and women. By the time of the visit with my London students



A young Maasai girl in her ceremonial circumcision head-dress

a number of female elders had made the decision to perform 'modified' ceremonies to initiate girls into womanhood, while avoiding the health risks associated with genital cutting. This decision followed a process of dialogue initiated in eight villages, from 2005-2008, in a series of grassroots workshops with trained Maasai peer educators. The cultural significance of female initiation and FGM was discussed with practitioners, parents, school students, traditional leaders, community elders, and young men planning marriage. An unexpected result of the work was that in November 2006, around thirty girls ran away from home and sought refuge at Noonkodini School, either because their families wanted them to undergo FGM, and/or because they had tried to force them into unwanted marriages with much older men. It seemed clear that these decisions had been far from easy for either the girls or the elders to make.

Talking about such issues in school, as the Tanzanian government is encouraging by putting *Unanswered Cries* on the curriculum, helps to give teenage girls and boys a voice and a space to discuss sensitive issues. This was a voice and space that the students that I met clearly very much valued. For teachers it highlights possible tensions between gender empowerment and cultural identity. It provides a mode for discussion of issues that are often taboo or too personal for students and teachers to engage with directly.

*Charlotte Nussey is in the second year of a part-time Masters degree in Education and International Development at the Institute of Education. She teaches full-time in London.*



Maasai female elders dancing and singing songs that were written to celebrate their decision to have an alternative ritual to cutting



# Talking with Learners

## A long process where education matters a lot!

**Aissata Dia**

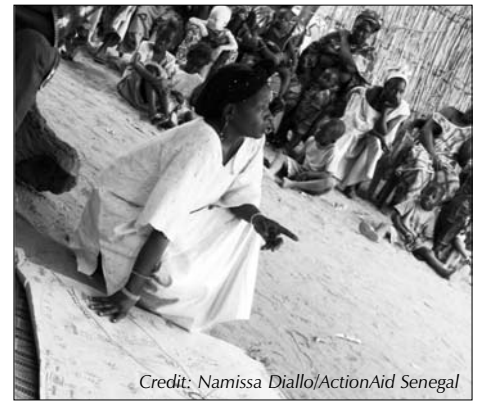
ActionAid Senegal runs Reflect Circles, where facilitators from a community raise women's consciousness through discussions on women's rights and roles in community development. The Reflect approach links adult learning to empowerment, and creates a democratic space which strengthens people's ability to speak for themselves. The Reflect Circle plays a role in teaching women how to read, write and calculate. They acquire important life skills on how to talk and learn how to be a leader, how to manage organisations and how to participate in an election. Each year a participative community action plan is drawn up. This is executed by the community and supported financially by ActionAid. Through this process women have gained more confidence to take the floor to voice ideas and defend their rights.

In the Diossong community Reflect Circle discussions between 2002 and 2007 led to women wanting to have their own land for gardening and other agricultural activities: in 2005 they went to local government with their demands and won legal entitlement to land. By 2007, 17 women's groups had a total of 17

hectares of land for gardening, and about 2,500 hectares to build a 'transformation unit' for processing groundnuts and other food products into more commercially profitable products such as oil, peanut butter, dried and ground produce, and couscous, with ActionAid Senegal's support.

Having gained entitlement to land, women wanted to have groundnut seeds. In Senegal there is a single rainy season per year and the main commercial crop is groundnuts. This is an important food crop as well as a product that can give peasants an income. Seeds were given to women and they managed the distribution. At harvest many women experienced a substantial increase in their earnings. After an evaluation and meetings in Reflect Circles women could see that they could progress still further. In 2006 women asked for their own point of trade to sell groundnuts. This demand could have been seen as an insult to men because women had never before sold groundnuts. At first the village chief refused to give women scales to organise the selling and they had to hire equipment. One

*Aissata Dia is the Programme Manager for Diossong and Djilor and Education Coordinator for ActionAid Senegal. Her work in supporting education received national recognition in 2007.*



Credit: Namissa Diallo/ActionAid Senegal

### Reflect session in 2007 in Senegal

operator lobbied the Governor, Head of Region, who stopped the women's operation. But the women went to the Governor and explained the challenges they face in having to support their families, and the need for them to be able to sell their produce and manage their own point of trade. They gained his authorisation, and he congratulated them. Building from the initial ideas first developed in the Reflect Circles ActionAid Senegal has helped women sell groundnuts, a landmark achievement.

Women now control their own farming and marketing activities and have their own bank accounts. Men give them greater respect in decision making. This means women can help girls go to and continue at school. Nobody could ever have imagined these achievements in 2002 when the women were not confident to even speak in public.

## Viewpoint



### Expanding gender equality in Latin America: an asymmetrical pathway

**Ivette Hernandez Santibañez**

In 2005 and before Michelle Bachelet won the Chilean presidency, she stated that women from Latin America live in a society where they have been playing substantive roles. Her election to the presidency of one of the most conservative countries of Latin America was a huge victory for a professional woman and single mother. But, is Michelle Bachelet a single, unique case, or is Latin America expanding equity and creating opportunities for girls and women?

In the Latin American region as a whole, girls generally have good opportunities to enrol in school and there has been a trend towards gender parity at all levels of education. However, this is not the case in all countries. In Guatemala, Bolivia, Peru and El Salvador disparities in enrolment rates between boys and girls persist, with girls being disadvantaged at some levels of education. In countries with the lowest levels of completion of

primary education, such as Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, poor girls from rural areas tend to be particularly disadvantaged, pointing to some of the ways in which gender inequality and poverty combine to keep girls out of school.

Across the region poverty levels continue to be high, and women, children and indigenous groups are most at risk of falling into poverty. According to the Social Panorama of Latin America 2009, the poverty rate among children under the age of 15 is 1.7 times higher than the poverty rate among adults in Brazil, Panama and Uruguay. Women from Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Costa Rica, Chile, Dominican Republic, Panama and Uruguay are still more exposed to poverty than men. The hidden, gendered face of poverty constrains the empowerment of girls and women. Even where girls do better on

educational achievements it does not guarantee them better prospects for social mobility, and 11 or 12 years of formal education does not necessarily result in opportunities for obtaining well-paid work. Despite progress in terms of access to education, women are still exposed to more precarious working conditions and higher levels of informality than men.

We need to open education to those most vulnerable groups to allow girls to dream about a future as women with equal opportunities. In this way they will increasingly be able to secure professional opportunities, or even become presidents as Michelle Bachelet managed to do in 2006.

*Ivette Hernandez is a Chilean PhD student at the Institute of Education, University of London, and a former teacher and education consultant.*

# UNIFEM and the Ministry of Education in Timor-Leste: A positive gender report card

Jennifer Ward

Education is the gateway to transforming a life. Enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals, boys and girls who complete school walk into a world full of opportunity previously impossible. But ensuring girls complete school can be an enormous challenge, one that the Ministry of Education in Timor-Leste is seeking to overcome with support from UNIFEM.

UNIFEM has assisted the Ministry of Education in cementing a gender perspective at all levels from strategic planning to daily school life. Afonso Soares, Director of Policy and Planning at the Ministry, believes considering gender is instrumental for the Ministry's work: 'If we know the gender issues, and look at the sex disaggregated data, we see the reality for girls'.

Female education in Timor-Leste is a tale of two schools. The literacy gap between girls and boys is fast closing, due to Government efforts in primary education. But the Committee for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which distributed its Concluding Comments in November last year, noted with concern the high dropout rates of girls in secondary and tertiary education. Although one in three students in higher education is female, only 20% of these women go on to finish their studies. The issue of female retention in higher education is so prominent that that the Government declared education the theme of this year's International Women's Day.



Afonso Soares, Director of Policy and Planning of the Ministry of Education, Timor-Leste, with the Gender Unit: Muriel Lauvige (UNIFEM's Gender and Development Advisor), Cesaltina da Costa Isac, and Alfredo Gama

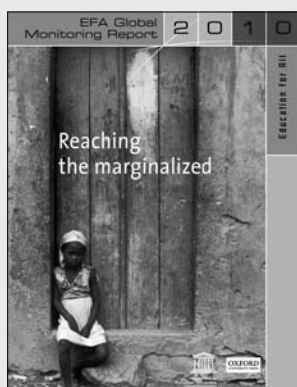
UNIFEM has assisted the Ministry in pinpointing why so many girls do not complete higher education. The comprehensive Gender Assessment, released in 2009, identified a number of factors that disrupt girls' education. Access to schools was one such factor. Most schools are clumped in the urban centres of Dili and Baucau. Even districts near these centres do not benefit from their proximity. Dili, which has 19 of the country's 71 secondary schools, is a world away from neighbouring Liquica, which has only two high schools in the entire district. As such, many students in rural areas are simply unable to complete their education.

UNIFEM has worked to ensure that gender activities are institutionalised in the Ministry. A permanent gender unit reporting directly to the Director of Policy ensures that a

gender perspective is consistently provided and considered. The Ministry has integrated its gender action plan with its education strategic plan, making gender central in the Ministry's outlook.

Mr Soares hopes that gender awareness in the education system will have effects beyond the Ministry: 'Gender is important not just in the Ministry of Education but around the country. Awareness will come through education. By promoting gender issues in schools, they will be reduced in the future'. With the assistance of UNIFEM, the Ministry of Education is in a position to formulate strategies to ensure that all girls in Timor-Leste can complete their education and walk into a bright future.

**Jennifer Ward is the Communication Officer at UNIFEM Timor-Leste**



## Book review

Review by Eva Sajoo

## UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the Marginalized

The 2010 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report comes at a critical time. The Education for All commitment made in 2000 in Dakar, Senegal, set 2015 as the target for achieving global education. While the target is still achievable, significant challenges remain. The UNESCO report addresses the consequences of the global financial crisis, which occupied headlines - and budgets - throughout 2009. While enormous sums have been mobilised to stabilise failing financial institutions, the amount allotted to international development

has predictably faltered. Unemployment in developed countries is a hardship, but as the fallout hits developing countries, the impact is far more severe. Disadvantaged girls continue to outnumber boys at 54% of the total number of children out of school. Though this figure approaches parity, it masks an underlying difference: the girls not in school are far less likely than their male counterparts ever to enrol. Further, the education provided to girls in school often serves to channel them toward less lucrative employment options.

# Three visionary women's rights activists – a tribute to Myriam Merlet, Megalie Marcelin and Anne Marie Coriolan

**Mano Candappa**

Myriam Merle Megalie Marcelin and Anne Marie Coriolan, founders of three of Haiti's most important advocacy organisations working on behalf of women and girls, were among the tens of thousands who died in the devastating earthquake that struck in January. Described in *The Guardian* as 'enterprising activists who had taken on a legal and social system', they worked both within and outside Haiti's government. Along with the organisations they led, their efforts helped bring about the criminalisation of rape in Haiti in 2005. They also helped bring about legal equality in marital and family relations between men and women, and protection for domestic workers.

These inspiring women were activists in the first wave of civil society organisations to emerge with the end of the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti in 1986. Author Myriam Merlet founded the organisation Enfofam which works to raise awareness of women and their achievements. She helped start domestic violence shelters in Port-au-Prince, and worked for years as Chief of Staff at Haiti's Ministry for Gender and the Rights of Women. As Chief of Staff, Myriam drew international attention to the predicament of Haiti's poor women, and to sexual assault used as a means of control and oppression by soldiers, police and criminal gangs. Sociologist Anne Marie Corilan served with Myriam as a top adviser to the Women's Rights Ministry. Anne Marie founded Solidarite Fanm Ayisyen

(Solidarity with Haitian Women or SOFA), an advocacy and services organisation. She fought fiercely to have the courts recognise rape as an instrument of terror and war, rather than merely as a crime of passion. The third activist, lawyer and actress Megalie Marcelin, founded Kay Fanm (Women's House), which supports victims of domestic violence. She once kept an abusive husband from walking free by calling on women to pack the courtroom staring down at the judge, to deflect the defendant's political clout from influencing the judgement.

In Haiti such stark gender inequalities went side by side with a lack of education. For example, the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report (GMR) 2010 shows that in 2005 10.4 percent of the population aged 17-22 (11.2 percent of girls as against 9.4 percent of boys) had experienced fewer than 2 years of education. Poverty lends an added gendered dimension: 59 percent

of girls from the poorest households were found to be in education poverty (or have spent fewer than 4 years in education). The earthquake can only compound such lack of educational opportunities. As the GMR points out, 'the effects of shocks on schooling tend to be more pronounced in low-income countries. The children of the poorest households are most likely to suffer adverse consequences as regards education, health and nutrition'. The effects of natural disasters for education in such countries are said to be long-lasting. While we join with feminists around the world in mourning the loss of Myriam, Anne Marie and Megalie, it is our hope that the legacies of these pioneers will inspire Haiti's women to continue the fight for women's rights and for education and equal opportunities.

**Mano Candappa is a Senior Research Officer at the Institute of Education, University of London**

**Myriam Merlet who along with Megalie Marcelin and Anne Marie Coriolan was killed in Haiti's earthquake**



While budgets everywhere are tightening, the sums of money needed to achieve the EFA goals amounts to just 2% of the funds raised to bail out four major banks in the US and UK, and represents an investment at least as critical. This report discusses the extent of the aid shortfall, and the varied reasons that funds are not getting through to education budgets in developing countries. Among the suggestions in this year's report is reform of the Fast-Track Initiative (FTI) led by the World Bank to support the EFA goals.

The urgency is evident as the report shows the integral link between lack of education and other social problems such as poverty and health. The connection between these

issues and social and political stability is hardly mysterious, making the education gap a matter of international concern. One of the report's most important features is a new analytical tool: the Deprivation and Marginalisation in Education data set. Rather than looking at national enrolment and literacy averages, this index reveals patterns of marginalisation that disproportionately affect particular communities. These include financially insecure families, migratory communities, gender inequalities and ethnic minorities. By "increasing the visibility of the most marginal" in both developed and developing countries, this tool offers the information needed to target policies and aid projects

more effectively. The report concludes with strong recommendations, for governments in developing countries and international donors alike, to make Education for All an achievable goal. The work makes very interesting reading and is an important resource for policy formulation and consideration of the question of what marginalisation is and how education can change this.

**Eva Sajoo holds an MA in International Development and Education from the Institute of Education, University of London. Her research focuses on women and education in transitional states, particularly Afghanistan.**

# Forthcoming events 2010

12 April – 14 May	Engendering Empowerment: Education and Equality (E4) e-conference <a href="http://www.e4conference.org/e4e">www.e4conference.org/e4e</a>
25 April – 2 May	Global Action Week on Financing for Education
15 May	International Day of Families (United Nations)
17 – 20 May	Engendering Empowerment: Education and Equality (E4) Conference, Dakar, Senegal <a href="http://www.e4conference.org">www.e4conference.org</a> and <a href="http://www.ocs.e4conference.org">www.ocs.e4conference.org</a>
6-8 June	International Working Group on Education, Sweden
7 – 9 June	Women Deliver 2010 Conference: Delivering solutions for women and girls Washington, D.C., USA
9 June	International Day against Child Labour
26 – 27 June	G20 Summit Meeting

## United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI)

UNGEI was launched in April 2000 at the World Education Forum in Dakar by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. It is the Education For All (EFA) flagship for girls' education, a partnership that embraces the United Nations system, governments, donor countries, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, and communities and families. UNGEI provides stakeholders with a platform for action and galvanizes their efforts to get girls in school.

UNGEI's vision is a world where all girls and boys will have equal access to free, quality education.

UNICEF is the lead agency and Secretariat for UNGEI. A Global Advisory Committee is composed of key partners and members who share in the planning, decision-making, guidance and accountability of UNGEI. At the country level, UNGEI 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. It operates as a mechanism to advance education strategies and the technical capacity to assist countries. UNGEI partners mobilize resources for both targeted project interventions and country programmes as well as large-scale systemic interventions designed to impact on the whole education sector.

**For more information on UNGEI go to [www.ungei.org](http://www.ungei.org)**



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Beyond Access was set up in January 2003. Its main aims are:

- To contribute to achieving MDG 3 – promoting gender equality and empowering women – by generating and critically examining knowledge and practice regarding gender equality and education
- To provide appropriate resources to share and disseminate for the purpose of influencing the policies of government departments, national and international NGOs and international institutions including UN agencies

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or [www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/issues/education/gender\\_equality.html](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/issues/education/gender_equality.html)

The views expressed in this newsletter are entirely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the project, their partners or sponsors.

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