

1. Beyond Access for Girls and Boys

How to achieve good-quality, gender-equitable education



Leading the School Assembly, Zambezia Province, Mozambique

This introductory paper frames the issues and challenges to be faced in achieving gender equality and quality Education For All (EFA). The issues — which include not only ensuring access to education for girls and women, but the completion of a good quality education for both boys and girls so that they can use their education to have a positive effect on their futures — are taken up in more detail in subsequent papers.

This is the first of nine papers in a series on Education and Gender Equality, which have been developed from the work of the Beyond Access: Gender, Education, and Development, project.¹ The focus of the series is on how to ensure not only equal access to a basic education for boys and girls, but that gender equality is a key part of the practice of that education. With greater numbers of girls enrolling in schooling, much needs to be done to ensure good quality education for all children. How can NGOs, policy-makers, and researchers work together to ensure that all girls and boys have access to an education that is equitable and of good quality, and to ensure that they develop the knowledge and skills they need to achieve what they want for their lives? This introductory paper frames the issues and challenges to be faced in achieving gender equality and quality Education For All (EFA). These issues and challenges are taken up in more detail in subsequent papers.²

Why is gender equality important, and why are we still talking mostly about girls and women?

Key facts and figures

- There are approximately 100 million school-age children worldwide who are not in school. Of these, 55 per cent are girls.
- There are almost 800 million people aged 15 and above living without basic literacy skills worldwide, of whom 64 per cent are women.³
- Of 180 countries that have been monitoring progress towards gender parity in education, 76 have not yet achieved equal numbers of girls and boys in primary school, and the gender disparities are nearly always at the expense of girls.⁴
- In some countries, girls outperform boys in school, but later fail to gain equality in work or political participation. In the poorest countries it is girls who face barriers to equality of opportunity, and do not achieve equal outcomes from education.
- Education is a right. Girls who are not in school and women who are illiterate are being denied their right to an education.

Education and the Millennium Development Goals

The United Nations' eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), aimed at eradicating global poverty and promoting development, are among the most widely supported set of global aspirations in effect today. All 191 member states of the UN have pledged their commitment to meet them by 2015.

Two of the MDGs directly address issues of education and gender:

- Goal 2 aims to 'achieve universal primary education', with a specific target to 'ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling'.
- Goal 3 is broadly framed to 'promote gender equality and empower women', with a narrow target to 'eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and at all levels by 2015'.⁵

The MDGs focus on the number of girls and boys enrolling in, or finishing, school as a measurement of success, but this is a very crude measure of gender

equality and empowerment. Gender parity simply refers to equal numbers of boys and girls being present in schooling.

More ambitious and meaningful aims would be that, once in school, girls and boys experience quality learning and teaching, and that equality in schooling is linked with positive changes towards equality in broader society. Yet measures and actions for ensuring the quality of education and achieving gender equity in education are not addressed explicitly in any of the MDGs. The Millennium targets and goals need to be widened to address this aim and should include, as well as the numbers of children not in school, the high drop-out rates, and the numbers of girls and boys who complete primary schooling but who are still unable to read, write, calculate, or use their learning. If many of the MDGs are to be achieved, the current focus on access of girls to education must also be linked with a broader focus on adult education and literacy for women (see paper 3: 'Gender Equality and Adult Basic Education').

Culture within schools

Millions of girls who attend school today are the first in their families ever to do so. Success in getting girls into school may be sustained if schools are made welcoming for them, with positive changes in approaches to learning and teaching and in the curriculum. Without this, although larger numbers of children will enter school, many of them will quickly drop out again, and of those who stay, only some will learn in ways that will help them to thrive.

Both teachers and pupils often have very set ideas about the ways in which girls and boys should behave, and the organisation of the school day can reinforce these ideas. Chores such as fetching water, cleaning classrooms, and cooking for a male head teacher are often assigned to girls and female teachers. Some teachers have deep-seated beliefs that boys are naturally superior to girls, that they perform better than girls, and that a woman or girl should not challenge male authority. These beliefs can result in girls not achieving to their best potential and can restrict their aspirations for further study. Harassment of girls by male teachers is a major reason for girls dropping out of school.

Making schooling safer in Bangladesh

By the late 1990s in Bangladesh, national statistics indicated that equal numbers of boys and girls were enrolling in both primary and lower secondary schooling. However, there is still a long way to go to achieve gender equality. Insecurity is a major factor constraining girls' education, and every day schoolgirls run the risk of experiencing violent behaviour.

This has not gone unchallenged, and a variety of projects address the root causes of sexual violence, mostly through NGOs. These include the Centre for Mass Education and Science and BRAC (the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), which runs workshops with adolescent girls — and now also boys — through the Adolescent Peer Organised Network. While promising, however, such programmes are only able to reach a small part of the population.

Other projects tend to focus on the logistical aspects of making access to school safer for girls — for example, by building schools within a 'safe' walking distance of their homes. While such measures may be a useful stopgap, it is necessary to move the focus beyond the concrete resources needed to get girls into school and to address the hostile environment they face while at school, and the wider societal issues of sexual violence.⁶

Teacher conditions and retention

In many countries, retention of teachers is difficult, especially in rural areas. Teachers face multiple problems, including low pay and poor conditions, that contribute to low morale and low status. Poor mobility and transport mean that often they receive no professional support in their classrooms. Payment of their salaries can be a problem if the government has decentralised responsibility for payment, and local authorities do not have adequate funding or efficient systems for payment. Worse still, where there is no government schooling, it is often the poorest communities who have to run their own schools and pay for their own teachers' salaries.

Women teachers often have even lower pay and even fewer opportunities for promotion than men. Employment of women as 'para-teachers', at a fraction of the salary of a regular teacher, has serious implications for the professionalism and status of women. In some countries, women also have inadequate arrangements for maternity leave. However, teachers can help to make schools transformative places by helping girls and boys challenge gender stereotypes and inequalities, both in the school and outside. For this they themselves need training and support (see paper 2: 'Gender Equality in Schools').

Wider society

To increase demand for girls' education, it is important that it is seen as valuable and relevant. What women and girls *want* from their education depends on how they feel it will help them in the future. Some people refuse to contemplate the education of girls because it appears to undermine accepted cultural practices. It is important not to ignore opposition to gender equality in school but to consider instead how the race and class inequalities that sometimes nurture this opposition can be addressed. When traditional leaders and elders have been consulted, there has been success in changing attitudes to formal schooling for girls. However, *all* views in communities including those of women need to be taken into account, not just those of the recognised leader or head of household.

Government responsibilities

Education, in the most rounded sense, is an individual, a community, and a household issue, but the state has an overall responsibility to ensure formal education is provided equitably to all children (see paper 5 'Making it Happen: Political Will for Gender Equality in Education'). Basic education should be free at the point of delivery, because charges are inequitable, whether user fees or 'hidden' expenses, such as transport, books, uniforms, or community levies.

Paper 4: 'Beyond the Mainstream: Gender Equality for Nomadic and Pastoralist Girls and Boys' looks at the example of nomad and pastoralist children, who form a significant minority of those out of school, and considers how, if the MDGs are to be achieved, governments must develop flexible and innovative strategies to reach them, help close the gender gaps, and support quality education.

Partnership

The notion of 'partnership', involving greater co-ordination and harmonisation at all levels to achieve a global development agenda, underlies all the Millennium Development Goals. Examples of the different kinds of partnership that have been set up with the aim of working explicitly for girls' education and gender

equality, include the Beyond Access project, the Global Campaign for Education (GCE),⁷ and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE).⁸ An example of a high-profile partnership between UN agencies and donors is the UNICEF-led UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI).⁹

The challenge is to develop new and innovative partnerships based on equality, trust, respect, and dialogue, where the agenda is set jointly and local views and knowledge are respected and deliberately sought. Through such partnerships, people excluded by poverty, discrimination, and HIV/AIDS can influence and control aspects of their lives, using institutions, opportunities, and strategies that they shape for themselves. Good communication and dialogue, with flexible, transparent processes, where disagreements are negotiated and resolved, are essential characteristics in developing such partnerships.

Partnership needs to be approached in two complementary ways to achieve gender equality in education, and therefore to attain the MDGs:

- Through a common goal to achieve Millennium Development Goal 3 and Education for All.
- Through working in a gender-equitable way to achieve all the goals.

Commitment at international, national, and local levels is needed to build partnerships to achieve this, along with greater participation at the local, school, and community levels.

HIV and AIDS

Gender inequality is a major driver of the HIV pandemic. Gender disparities in education are particularly significant, because they contribute to the social conditions that facilitate the spread of the HIV virus. There were an estimated 40 million people worldwide living with HIV. In recent years, the overall proportion of HIV-positive women has steadily increased and the epidemic's 'feminisation' is most apparent in sub-Saharan Africa, where 57 per cent of adults infected are women, and 75 per cent of young people infected are women and girls.¹⁰ To date, education planning which takes into consideration HIV/AIDS has still to adopt a comprehensive approach to gender and to addressing gender equality.

While it is extremely important to promote the education of girls, the development needs of boys should also be addressed. Change will not happen until both girls and boys change sexual and reproductive behaviour and gender norms. Harmful practices, such as violence against girls at school and the sexual abuse of girls by teachers, need to be eliminated. This can be done by ensuring that schools become environments where gender equality is practised openly and consistently – including the removal of stereotyping and gender bias in the curriculum. Teachers can be trained in making the classroom a more positive environment for girls in terms of layout, use of resources, and teacher-student interaction. At the same time, ministries of education need to monitor and evaluate the implementation of education policy from a gender equality perspective and take action to ensure that HIV prevention and the impact of AIDS are addressed through education.¹¹

Evidence strongly suggests that policy and programme interventions that serve to promote gender equality at school will contribute to reducing the vulnerability of young people, girls and women in particular, to HIV infection. Work not

explicitly focused on AIDS – such as advocacy work for the abolition of fees and the protection of girls at and around school from violence, exploitation, and discrimination – can directly and strategically contribute to national HIV/AIDS responses.

Developing a gender equality approach to working with HIV/AIDS

In 2001–03, building on experiences in South Africa, the Juventude Alerta (Youth Alert) programme at the teacher training college in Beira, Mozambique, trained volunteer teachers in participatory techniques and activities aimed at engaging teenage students in rural secondary schools on issues surrounding HIV, including gender issues.

A volunteer teacher started a group for the older girls in her class, to look at issues important to them as young women. The girls were eager to discuss, and begin to assert, their sexual rights. Three weeks on, the school principal spoke with the volunteer teacher. 'We like what you are doing, encouraging these girls to work harder and be good, but please be careful, we don't want them having the idea that they cannot be cooks and cleaners of the house... They must know their place...', he said. This illustrates the difficulties encountered by the programme, which actively sought to challenge male power in heterosexual relationships and to teach how this issue needed to be carefully and sensitively addressed.¹²

What do we mean by 'gender equality' and 'quality education'?

Key terms in common use when talking about education include 'gender parity', 'gender equality', and 'gender equity'. This section provides an easy guide to how these terms are generally used.

Gender parity in education is a rather narrow aspiration, simply entailing equal numbers of girls and boys being present in schools. Many countries are making progress on gender parity, but the limited nature of the concept means that more challenging dimensions of gender equality and equity are not being monitored, measured or discussed.

Gender equality and gender equity: there is no consensus as to the precise difference between these two terms, exactly what they mean, or how they should be used. They are often used interchangeably. However, it is generally agreed that to achieve gender equity/equality, there is a need to remove deep-seated barriers to equality of opportunity for both sexes – such as discriminatory laws, customs, practices, and institutional processes. It also entails developing the freedoms of all individuals, irrespective of gender, to choose outcomes they value.

Gender mainstreaming seeks to ensure that organisations and institutions express gender equality as one of their aims and that they actively promote it in their work. There is a lack of emphasis in the education sector on gender analysis, gender training, capacity building, and networking to redress gender inequalities. This is what mainstreaming should be about.

Quality education: an education system lacks key dimensions of quality if it is discriminatory or does not ensure that the education of all girls and boys is personally and socially worthwhile. Dimensions of educational quality which are crucial for the achievement of gender equality in schooling include the content of learning materials and the curriculum, the nature of the teaching and learning materials, teacher-pupil relations, and gender-sensitive use of resources. Aspects

of quality and gender equality in education include the freedom to enter school, to learn and participate there in safety and security, to develop identities that tolerate others, to promote health, and to enjoy economic, political, and cultural opportunities.

What is needed to move towards good-quality, gender-equitable education for all?

Key points

- Adequate resources: financial and human (see paper 7 'Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Education').
- Increased individual, institutional, and organisational capacity to deliver gender equality in education (see paper 6 'Capacity Development for Achieving Gender Equality in Education').
- Participation by NGOs, community-based organisations, teachers, parents, and students themselves, especially girls and women.
- Networking and partnerships between organisations for greater impact on change.
- Good documentation of what works and what does not work, and why.

Key processes and organisations

Education for All

The Framework for Action, formulated at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, reaffirmed the commitment of governments to EFA by 2015. UNESCO chairs the High Level Group on EFA, monitors progress towards it at the Institute for Statistics, and produces annual Global Monitoring Reports. UNICEF is the lead agency for the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), launched at Dakar in 2000, which aims to eliminate gender discrimination and disparity in education systems, through action at global, national, district, and community levels.

Gender equality

Under the auspices of the Commission for the Status of Women, the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, agreed a 'Platform for Action' based on seven main points, including protection against violence and the promotion of economic autonomy for women. Inequalities and inadequacies in education and training, and unequal access to them, are critical areas of concern. In 2005, a 'Beijing +10' review and appraisal of progress on the Platform for Action was held in New York.

Human development and ending poverty

At the UN Millennium Summit in 2000, 150 heads of state adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration and resolved to meet eight Millennium Development Goals by 2015. These include halving the proportion of people living in poverty and ensuring primary education for all children. Progress on the eight MDGs was reviewed in New York in September 2005. The Global Call

to Action against Poverty was launched in 2005, as an international movement seeking to hold governments accountable for their promises on ending poverty.¹³

Civil society campaigning for EFA

The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) brings together major NGOs and teachers' unions in over 150 countries around the world. It lobbies the international community to fulfil its promises to provide free, compulsory public basic education for all, and in particular for disadvantaged and deprived sections of society. The GCE-sponsored Global Week of Action, held in April each year, promotes education as a basic human right. The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) was created in 1992 and has grown into a network of 33 national chapters across Africa. FAWE seeks to ensure that girls have access to school, complete their studies, and perform well at all levels.

Notes

¹ The 'Beyond Access' project on gender, education, and development is a joint initiative of Oxfam GB, DFID, and the Institute of Education, University of London. see: www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/beyondaccess.

² The Education and Gender Equality Series comprises the following papers:

1. Beyond Access for Girls and Boys: How to Achieve Good-Quality, Gender-Equitable Education
2. Gender Equality in Schools
3. Gender Equality and Adult Basic Education
4. Beyond the Mainstream: Gender Equality for Nomadic and Pastoralist Girls and Boys
5. Making it Happen: Political Will for Gender Equality in Education
6. Developing Capacity to Achieve Gender Equality in Education
7. Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Education
8. Girls' Education in Africa
9. Girls' Education in Asia (this will be published in early 2006)

³ UNESCO (2004) 'Education For All – The Quality Imperative' EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005. Paris: UNESCO.

⁴ UNESCO (2005) Education for All – Literacy for Life' EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, Paris: UNESCO.

⁵ www.un.org/millenniumgoals. The MDG3 target of gender parity by 2005 has already been missed.

⁶ J. Raynor (2003) 'Girls Running the Gauntlet' *Equals*, Issue 3, October 2003.

⁷ www.campaignforeducation.org.

⁸ www.fawe.org.

⁹ www.ungei.org.

¹⁰ UNAIDS (2004) '2004 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic' Geneva: UNAIDS.

¹¹ D. Clarke (2005) 'Planning and Evaluation for Gender Equality in Education in the context of HIV and AIDS', Beyond Access Seminar 5.

¹² M. Thorpe (2005) 'Learning About HIV/AIDS in Schools: Does a Gender Equality Approach Make a Difference?', In S. Aikman and E. Unterhalter (eds) *op. cit.*

¹³ www.whiteband.org.

Cover photograph: Sheila Aikman, Oxfam GB

Further reading

For Beyond Access project policy papers, seminar papers, and *Equals* newsletter, see www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/beyondaccess.

Aikman, S. and E. Unterhalter (2005) *Beyond Access: Transforming Policy and Practice for Gender Equality in Education*, Oxfam GB, Oxford.

Rao, N. and I. Smyth (2005) *Partnerships for Girls' Education*, Oxfam GB, Oxford.

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For comments on issues raised in this paper, please e-mail:
beyondaccess@oxfam.org.uk

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Oxfam House
John Smith Drive
Cowley
Oxford
OX4 2JY

Tel: +44.(0)1865.473727
E-mail: enquiries@oxfam.org.uk
www.oxfam.org.uk