

Education and Training of Women

I. Global commitments

The *Beijing Platform for Action* called on Governments to eliminate disparities between women and men in both access to education and educational outcomes. This concerns all levels and forms of education, including basic and primary education, secondary and advanced studies, vocational and labour market training, adult literacy and lifelong learning. The *Beijing Platform for Action* set out six strategic objectives.

- (Ensure equal access to education;
- (Eradicate illiteracy among women;
- (Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education;
- (Develop non-discriminatory education and training;
- (Allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms; and
- (Promote lifelong education and training for girls and women.

The *Beijing Platform for Action* commitments should be seen in the context of the 1990 World Conference on Education for All, at which the international community set the challenge of achieving universal primary education by the year 2000. High on the Education for All agenda was improved access to quality education for girls and women, including the removal of obstacles to participation and the elimination of gender stereotyping in education. Progress was reviewed mid-decade and the Amman Affirmation of 1995 stated that: "the priority of priorities must continue to be the education of women and girls."

In 2000, the World Education Forum in Dakar reviewed achievements and again set time-specific goals, known as the *Education for All* goals. Two of the six goals of the Dakar Framework of Action focus specifically on achieving gender equality in education:

- (Goal 2: Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
- (Goal 5: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.¹

The outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" called for policies that guarantee equal access to education and the elimination of gender disparities in education, including vocational training, science and technology, and ensure quality education and improved enrolment and retention rates. It also called for accelerated action to meet the specific targets set out in the *Beijing Platform for Action* as well as highlighted the need to develop a gender-sensitive curriculum at all levels of education to address gender stereotyping as one of the root causes of segregation in working life.²

critical to poverty reduction and development. MDG2 focuses on universal primary

worst situation in 1999, witnessed the greatest improvement as its ratio rose from 0.83 to 0.92. Countries noted for their progress include Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, India, Nepal, the Niger and Yemen.⁴

Girls' participation in primary education as a whole has also increased. Enrolment in primary education rose from 92 girls per 100 boys in 1999 to 95 girls per 100 boys in 2005. South and West Asia, again, saw the steepest improvement, going from 82 to 93 girls per 100 boys between 1999 and 2005. By 2005, 118 countries out of 188 with available data had achieved gender parity in primary education. A number of countries which had not reached gender parity nevertheless made notable progress. These include Afghanistan, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Guinea, India, Morocco, Nepal and Yemen.⁵

Promoting girls' access to education in Benin

Benin took a number of measures to increase girls' participation in primary education, including:

- Eliminating tuition fees for girls in rural areas and compensating schools for the loss of income through provision of equipment and school furniture, and through building larger schools that can admit more students;

- Organizing awareness-raising campaigns to encourage parents to send girls to and to keep them in schools;

- Rewarding the best girl students with prizes;

- Promoting girls' school attendance through a variety of means, for instance through establishing boarding schools for the most deserving girls in the largest towns of each *département*.

Source: Combined initial, second and third periodic reports of Benin to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2002).⁶

Globally, the survival rate to the last grade of primary education was nearly the same for girls and boys, at 86 per cent and 87 per cent in 2004. However, while 70 countries had achieved gender parity in survival rates, another 53 witnessed substantial disparities, more often in favour of girls than boys.⁷

The number of children not attending school dropped from 96 million in 1999 to 72 million in 2005. While girls still predominate among out-of-school children, their share has fallen slightly from 59 per cent in 1999 to 57 per cent in 2005.⁸

Secondary education

Gender disparity at the secondary level narrowed in two-thirds of the 144 countries for which data was available between 1999 and 2005. There were 94 girls per 100 boys enrolled in secondary education in 2005, compared to 91 girls in 1999. Progress has, however, been uneven across regions. In countries where disparity prevailed, the imbalance was roughly as often in favour of girls as it was in favour of boys. Progress in girls'

enrolment rates was particularly noteworthy in the following countries: Benin, Cambodia, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Nepal, Togo, Uganda and Yemen.⁹

Bangladesh's female secondary school assistance programme

In Bangladesh, girls' enrolments in secondary school were low (below 30 per cent in 1990) and only about one-third of students enrolled in secondary school were girls. Students had to pay tuition fees to attend secondary school and cover costs of books, uniforms, examination fees, school supplies and transport. Under the stipend programme, the government decided to cover tuition fees, examination costs, books, uniforms and transport costs for girls in rural areas in secondary school (grades 6–10) if they attended at least 75 per cent of school days, earn acceptable grades and do not marry. The government provides the funds to girls in local bank accounts, which helps improve the standing of girls in their communities. During the first five years in pilot areas, girls' enrolments rose from 27 to 44 per cent, almost double the national average. The programme was initially implemented in about a quarter of rural districts and proved so popular that in 1994 the Bangladesh government eliminated girls' tuition fees and extended the stipend programme to all rural areas, nationwide. Girls' and boys' enrolments climbed to over 60 per cent, but girls' enrolments climbed faster than boys', and the gender gap shifted to favour girls slightly. By 1998 over 800,000 girls were receiving stipends. Recent research, controlling for other influences, shows that providing the stipend programme for an additional year boosts girls' enrolments by 8–12 per cent. More girls are going on to college and marrying later.

Source: Herz (2006). *Educating Girls in South Asia, Promising Approaches*.¹⁰

Tertiary education

Women have also gained greater access to tertiary education. While in 1999 there were 96 women per 100 men enrolled in higher education institutions, by 2005 women had outnumbered men, bringing the proportion to 105 women per 100 men. While wide disparities remain between regions, the ratio of enrolled women to men increased in all regions but Sub-Saharan Africa during this time period. The increase was particularly notable in the following countries: Azerbaijan, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malawi, Mauritius, Swaziland, Switzerland, Tunisia, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Yemen.¹¹

Illiteracy

While slow and uneven, there has nevertheless been some progress in women's access to literacy. Globally, the adult female literacy rate increased from 70 per cent of women in 1985-1994 to 77 per cent in 1995-2005. UNESCO expects it to further rise to 83 per cent in 2015. The greatest improvements were seen in the Arab States, in East Asia and the Pacific, and in South and West Asia. The literacy rate of young women (aged 15 to 25) has followed a similar progression, rising from 79 to 89 per cent of young women between 1985-1994 and 1995-2005. It is expected to reach 90 per cent in 2015.¹² Moreover, the gender disparity in adult literacy has narrowed: there were 89 literate women per 100 literate men in 1995-2004, compared to 85 literate women per 100 literate men during the previous decade.¹³

A number of countries show an emerging trend. In Botswana, El Salvador, Honduras, Jamaica, Lesotho, Liberia, Malta and Nicaragua for example, gender disparities in literacy rates favoured women, especially among young people. Between 1990 and 2000-2004, the number of countries with documented gender disparities favouring young women over young men increased from 15 to 22.¹⁴

Vocational training, science and technology

Limited cross-time data exists on girls' participation in vocational training. However, the available 2005 figures show that girls accounted for 45 per cent of secondary students enrolled in vocational training. The share of girls was comprised between 40 and 53 per cent in all regions, with the exception of South and West Asia where the proportion of girls was 23 per cent.¹⁵

Advancing girls' participation in vocational training in Egypt

Egypt reported that many of its ministries were involved in expanding women's access to vocational training, including the Ministries of Planning, Labor Force and Immigration, Culture, Housing, Health and Population, and Local Development. The Ministry of Local Development, for example, supported the creation of numerous vocational training centers and held a large number of seminars and training programmes, reaching thousands of female trainees and beneficiaries. Another illustration is the Ministry of Planning's Shorouk Programme which provided vocational training courses to women in rural areas. The Government also collaborated with NGOs, and in particular with the General Foundation of NGOs, to give women better access to vocational and technical training.

Source: National Report of Egypt (2004).¹⁶

The lack of data makes it difficult to compare the participation of girls in scientific education across time. According to the available data for 2005, a few countries have reached a rate of 40 per cent or higher of female participation in science and engineering education at the tertiary level. These include Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia in the Arab States, Mongolia in Central Asia, Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia in East Asia and the Pacific, and Argentina in Latin America and the Caribbean.¹⁷

Increasing women's representation in science and technology in Austria

Compared to other countries of the European Union, the proportion of women in technical sectors remains low in Austria. A joint initiative of four Austrian Ministries - FORTE (Women in Research and Technology) - aims to tackle this challenge and to promote women's access to scientific and technical fields. It was launched in 2002, co-financed by the European Social Fund, and includes the following objectives:

The Federal Ministry of Science and Research aims to increase the percentage of female professors within universities, which at 15 per cent lies far below the 55 per cent of female first-year students, through measures such as mentoring, promotion of female PhD students, and support to application processes for EU research funding. The Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth provides information and research on women in research and innovation, and is in the process of establishing

women-led research centres for applied research, the Laura Bassi Centres of Expertise, to promote the work of female researchers.
The Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology provides grants and funding to com

commitments made by the Dominican Republic at the World Conference on Education for All in Dakar in 2000; and

- (Systematically (and by consensus) incorporating recommendations for achievement of an education system free of gender bias in the curriculum and in the textbooks of the various levels, grades and areas.

Source: National Report of Dominican Republic (2004).²¹

Funding and monitoring

National expenditure

Both *Education for All* and the MDGs have focused considerable attention on girls' education, and spurred a momentum for action. The MDG target for eliminating gender disparities in education was the only one specified for the early date of 2005, reflecting widespread agreement about the urgency of addressing the gender gap for the overall achievement of the MDGs. The goal was not met in 2005. There is a large body of evidence on the benefits of educating girls, including the links to improving productivity, lowering infant and maternal mortality, improving nutrition and health, and countering the spread of HIV/AIDS.²²

While little data exists on national education spending directly benefiting girls, figures are available for public expenditure on education as a whole. Globally, the total public expenditure on education as a percentage of GNP increased from 4.5 per cent in 1999 to 4.9 per cent in 2005. In 26 developing countries, the share of public expenditure on education was six per cent or more of GNP in 2005. These countries include Botswana, Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland in Sub-Saharan Africa; Djibouti, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia in the Arab States; Fiji, Marshall Islands, Malaysia and Vanuatu in East Asia and the Pacific; Maldives in South and West Asia; Barbados, Bolivia, Grenada, Guyana, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in Latin America and the Caribbean; and Belarus, Slovenia and Ukraine in Central and Eastern Europe.²³

While the share of public expenditure on education in total government expenditure is considered a better measure of the level of priority assigned to education, only limited data exists. Of the 107 countries for which information was available in 2005, the following countries allocated at least 20 per cent of government expenditure to education: Djibouti, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates in the Arab States; Botswana, Cape Verde, Kenya, Lesotho and Madagascar in Sub-Saharan Africa; and the Islamic Republic of Iran, Malaysia, Mexico, the Republic of Moldova and Thailand in other regions.

Official development assistance

External aid directed to education has increased. Between 1999 and 2005, total aid to education grew from US\$7.3 billion to US\$8.3 billion (with a constant rise between 1999 and 2004, and a fall in 2005), and aid directed specifically to basic education increased from US\$2.8 billion to US\$3.7 billion. The share of education in sector-allocable ODA

remained virtually constant, at 12.7 per cent across all developing countries in 2004-2005, but with disparities by income level: between 1999-2000 and 2004-2005, the share of education grew from 14.2 per cent to 14.9 per cent for all low-income countries, and from 14 to 16 per cent for the least developed countries.²⁴

Among the members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD-DAC) that report on the gender equality focus of their ODA, 23 per cent of their sector-allocable ODA focused on gender equality in 2005-2006 was directed to education, making it the sector that received the largest share of gender-focused, sector-allocable aid. In comparison, this group of donors assigned 15 per cent of its total sector-allocable ODA to education.²⁵ These percentages are comparable to those available for the period 2001-2005.²⁶ It appears, however, that education gained in importance in 2006, representing 19.1 per cent of sector-allocable aid and reaching 26.6 per cent of gender-focused, sector-allocable aid.²⁷

Among the foreign aid instruments, there is some evidence that debt relief positively impacts education expenditure at the national level. Debt relief not only freed up funds for poverty-reduction measures, but also spurred Governments to increase pro-poor expenditure beyond the amounts reassigned from debt servicing.²⁸ While no breakdown by sector is available, it is likely that education, being central to poverty reduction, benefited from this increase in expenditure.

A number of global partnerships have been set up to accelerate progress. The Education for All Global Action Plan, led by UNESCO, aims to coordinate the action of UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank.²⁹ The Education for All Fast-Track Initiative, a global partnership of developing countries and donors, was launched in 2002 to foster more rapid progress by strengthening national education policies and mobilizing resources toward the achievement of universal primary education. It is coordinated by the World Bank and has 35 participating developing countries, 16 of which are in Africa.³⁰ The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), launched in 2000, is led by UNICEF and promotes girls' education through advocacy and technical support at the national level.³¹ In September 2008, Education for All: Class of 2015 was launched. This new initiative is a joint effort by multiple stakeholders to accelerate progress on the globally agreed education goals.³²

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1995/1996 and 2001/2002, 155 out of 204 countries or areas, representing 92 per cent of the world population, frequently reported primary enrolment data disaggregated by sex, and 187 countries or areas did so at least once during that time period.³⁴ The survival rate to the last grade of primary school provides another illustration: while in 1999, sex-disaggregated data was available for only 89 countries, by 2005 it existed for 123 countries out of 203.³⁵

Efforts are also being made to collect detailed statistics on literacy, for example with the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP), developed by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in partnership with other international agencies and technical experts. LAMP aims to provide detailed data on literacy and numeracy skills through a combination of household survey methods and educational assessments, taking into account local socio-cultural and linguistic contexts. It is being tested in El Salvador, Kenya, Mongolia, Morocco, Niger and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.³⁶

To tackle the challenge of obtaining data on non formal education, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics has developed a methodology and database - the Non-Formal Education Management Information System (NFE-MIS). This methodology has been used in Tanzania, India and Cambodia since 2001, Morocco, Jordan and Niger since 2005, and Bangladesh, Niger and Senegal since 2006.³⁷

III. Remaining gaps and challenges

While progress has been made towards the elimination of gender disparities in education and training, gains have been slow and uneven. Despite overall enrolment increases, disparities in school participation persist between regions, provinces or states and between urban and rural areas. Poor, indigenous and children with disability are also at a systematic disadvantage, as are those living in slums. In addition, poor education quality is emerging as a major concern.⁴¹ Achievement of gender parity has proven to be relatively more easy to achieve than the broader goal of gender equality in education.

Access to education

While there has been significant progress for girls in primary and secondary school participation globally, there remain disparities between regions and between countries. Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania, in particular, display the widest gender gaps in primary enrolment to the disadvantage of girls.⁴² Girls' participation in secondary education remains low in Sub-Saharan Africa and in South and West Asia.⁴³

Worldwide, 40 million girls – about 55 per cent of all children of primary school age – did not attend or dropped out of primary school in 2006.⁴⁴ A large number of these girls come from excluded groups, for instance ethnic, religious, linguistic, or racial minorities.⁴⁵

Including girls from excluded groups

Over the past decade, a range of programmes have helped close the education gap between boys and girls among disadvantaged communities.

In Chile, ten years of programmes providing additional support to improve the quality of the lowest-performing schools significantly reduced the gaps in learning achievement between indigenous and non-indigenous students, including girls.

In Brazil, Turkey, Bolivia and India, preschool programmes that involved both mothers and children from excluded groups have been effective in reducing children's subsequent primary school dropout rate and in boosting their achievement.

In India, community schools that used paraprofessional teachers, allowed the community to select and supervise teachers and hired part-time workers to escort girls from excluded groups to school, had higher enrollment, attendance and test scores compared with students in public schools.

Source: Lewis and Lockheed (2007). CGD Brief: Inexcusable Absence: Why 60 million girls still aren't in school and what to do about it.⁴⁶

It is estimated that 35 fragile states accounted for 37 per cent of all out-of-school children in 2005. Providing places in primary schools for these children will be particularly difficult.⁴⁷ Crowded and dilapidated classrooms, too few textbooks and insufficient instructional time are widespread problems. In countries affected by armed conflict, schools have been targeted. In Iraq more than 2,700 schools were looted, damaged or burned in 2003. Education infrastructure has been extensively damaged in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Kosovo, Mozambique and Timor-Leste. In Liberia, an estimated 23 per cent of all

Gender stereotypes

As emphasized in the *Education for All* commitments, the *Beijing Platform for Action* and CEDAW, it is important to broaden the focus beyond access to include issues of quality of teaching and learning. Textbooks, curricula and teacher attitudes continue to reinforce stereotypes on gender roles in society.⁵⁷ Content analysis of textbooks indicate gender bias against girls and women regardless of the level

donor support.⁶⁵ It is estimated that 72 out of 101 countries will not succeed in halving their adult literacy rates by 2015.⁶⁶ Adult literacy rates have remained well below the world average in South and West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (about 60 per cent), as well as in the Arab States and the Caribbean (about 70 per cent).⁶⁷

Improving data systems in support of policy development

Educational access and attainment statistics do not illustrate other gender constraints in education, such as the tendency for girls to choose study courses with fewer career possibilities.⁶⁸ This requires further breakdown of data.

The review of trends in national data avai

³² For more information about the initiative, see; http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=46881&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

³³ UNESCO (2007), *Literacy Initiative for Empowerment LIFE 2006-2015*. Available from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001529/152921e.pdf> (accessed 24 March 2009).

³⁴ United Nations Statistical Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2005). *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics*. Available from:

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