

EFA's Goal 5: Assessing Gender Parity and Equality In Education: Unfinished Agenda for 21st Century

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Abstract

International consensus on education priorities accords an important place to achieving gender justice in the educational sphere. Both the Dakar Education for All's 5th goal and the Millennium Development goal emphasise goal that are distinguished as gender parity goal [achieving equal participation of girls and boys in all forms of education based on their proportion in the relevant age-groups in the population] and gender equality goal [ensuring educational equality between boys and girls]. In turn these have been characterised as quantitative/numerical and qualitative goal respectively. There is thus need to understand the reports of UNGEI, EFA'S global monitoring report and MDG framework so that the meaning of the term gender parity and gender equality with reference to education can be connoted, linkages between them can be explored, and the best mechanisms to measure progress towards these goal can be identified and also take a stock of the progress made with respect to some of these questions in various countries and sub-regions especially in reference to the fifth goal of EFA Act (Education For All's act). The paper concludes with need recognizing that bringing all girl children to school is not merely an educational action but requires transformation of attitudes and behavioural dynamics of society, so that gender equality is seen as a value in itself worth pursuing.

Keywords: Primary and secondary education, gender equality, gender equality

INTRODUCTION

Universal compulsory primary education has long been a goal pursued by all countries as a basic philosophy. This goal received a new direction through the global vision that evolved during the World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien (Thailand) in 1990. The conference called for treating education as a basic need and a fundamental right of every individual. Representatives of the international community (155 countries, as well as representatives from some 150 organizations) agreed to "universalize primary education and massively reduce illiteracy by the end of the decade". From this conference, the World Declaration on Education for All was adopted, which stressed that education is a fundamental human right and pushed countries to strengthen their efforts to improve education in order to ensure the basic learning needs for all were met. The Framework for Action to Meet the Basic Learning Needs established six goal for the year 2000: Universal access to learning; A focus on

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equity; Emphasis on learning outcomes; Broadening the means and the scope of basic education; Enhancing the environment for learning; Strengthening partnerships by 2000.

In 2000, ten years later, the international community met again at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, an event which drew 1100 participants. The forum took stock of the fact that many countries were far from having reached the goal established at the World Conference on Education for All. The participants agreed on the Dakar Framework for Action which re-affirmed their commitment to achieving Education for All by the year 2015, and identified six key measurable education goal which aim to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015. In addition, the forum reaffirmed UNESCO's role as the lead organization with the overall responsibility of coordinating other agencies and organizations in the attempts to achieve these goal. The six goal established in The Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments are: Expand early childhood care and education; Provide free and compulsory primary education for all; Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults; Increase adult literacy by 50 per cent; Achieve gender parity by 2005, gender equality by 2015; Improve the quality of education.

The world is not on track to achieve the Education for All targets set for 2015. The year 2013 is upon us and the education community internationally is seeking to assess how far progress has been achieved in the areas of gender parity and equality in education. Although there has been progress in many areas, the overarching message to emerge from the 2011 EFA Global Monitoring Report is that most of the goal will be missed by a wide margin. Taking stock of the situation towards the end of the decade following the Jomtien Declaration, it was observed that gender disparities have persisted. Although great strides had been made, nearly two third of the children who were denied their right to education were female. Even though girls' education had been extensively documented as the investment that offered the greatest overall returns for economic development, national policies did not reflect this insight. It is in view of such an assessment that the Dakar Declaration on Education for All (EFA), as well as the Millennium Declaration, called upon national governments and the international community to pursue more focussed action and set concrete targets and a time frame for achieving the goal of gender equality in education.

The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) has been a part of the response to this call at the international level. National governments across the world have also been initiating action plans to meet the goal of universal participation of girls in primary education and moving forward to

achieve gender equality at all levels of education and in all spheres of life. In India, EFA is now realised through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, a programme for universalising elementary (6-14) education which was initiated in 2002 in response to a specific Constitutional Amendment that made education from 6-14 the basic human right of every Indian child. The problem is that universalisation has to start somewhere. (Alexander, 2008)

What progress has been made in this regard in the various countries and sub-regions? Does the quantitative progress also meet concerns of quality and equity? Do the overall figures represent real progress towards the goal of gender equality? Are there specific pockets and clusters within the sub-regions that continue to lag? These are critical questions that need closer examination. Various assessments during the post-Dakar period indicate substantial progress but significant unevenness across the sub-regions; they also point to persisting gender and social inequities and serious shortfalls in the quality of provisions and outcomes. There is increasing awareness that actions must move to a different plane – from merely counting the number of children enrolled to ensuring that all children enjoy an equal quality of education without gender, ethnic, caste or class distinctions.

NEED AND OBJECTIVE

This paper attempts to work towards clarity on what is meant by gender parity and gender equality with reference to education, explore the linkages between them, and identify the best mechanisms to measure progress towards these goal and also take stock of the progress made with respect to some of these questions in various countries and sub-regions especially in reference to the fifth goal of EFA Act (Education For All act) that is” *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*”.

This study being a qualitative review with respect to the equality of education discusses some indepth, gender indicators that pertain to the equality of education in the teaching-learning process that can make a difference to boys and girls. It suggests the disproportionate importance of quality to maintaining girls in school and why this is so. It looks at a number of pertinent ‘quality’ indicators from a gender perspective to assess equality and what constitutes girl-friendly education and why it appears so important to keeping girls in school. Disproportionate importance of quality to maintaining girls in school and why this is so. It looks at a number of pertinent ‘quality’ indicators from a gender perspective to assess equality.

The paper derives most of its findings from studies commissioned by UNGEI. In addition, it draws on several assessments of gender-related progress carried out under the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) framework during recent years and on new data emanating from UNGEI studies. Observations from these reports have been used to draw a broader picture of progress in girls' education and gender equality in the region. Data presented in the text, drawn mainly from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) database, relate to selected countries of the subregions that are critical to registering overall progress by 2015 or illustrate success achieved – thereby showing the way for other countries.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Meaning of Gender Equality and Parity in Education

Assessing progress towards gender equality, unlike gender disparity, is a complex proposition. The Dakar Framework for Action for EFA does not elaborate on the operational contours of gender equality. However, there is a consensus that gender equality needs to be viewed as a crosscutting policy goal that applies to all sectors and institutions. As the time-lag between international commitment, national policy, professional culture and everyday practice, increases and we move to the final shift, there is less consensus on what 'equality' actually entails. The international debate about the equality of education has been dominated by those who operate in the domains of policy, accountability and funding rather than in the arena of practice.

Gender equality rests on, but is not the same as, achieving gender parity, or females being represented in equal numbers as males in education, although the latter offers a 'first stage' measure of progress towards gender equality in education. Gender parity reflects 'formal' equality, in terms of access to, and participation in, education. 'Formal' equality can also be understood as equality that is 'premised on the notion of the 'sameness' of men and women, where the male actor is held to be the norm. This is reflected in the way gender parity is used in measuring EFA progress, where the gender parity index computes the ratio of female-to-male value of a given indicator, with the mean value being 1 (Subrahmanian, 2005).

A relational understanding of 'gender' requires recognition of the dynamic processes by which gender inequalities are constituted across different arenas of human life. Gender inequalities arise from the unequal power relations between women and men, and hence assessments of gender equality need to capture the relational dimensions of gender inequality. 'Formal equality'

measures numerical 'gaps' between female and male outcomes. However, for equality to be achieved, we need a definition that recognises that women and men start from different positions of advantage, and are constrained in different ways. Thus achievement of substantive equality requires the recognition of 'the ways in which women are different from men, in terms of their biological capacities and in terms of the socially constructed disadvantages women face relative to men.' (Kabeer, 1999).

In terms of content, the United Millennium Project has suggested that gender equality encompasses three main dimensions: (a) *capabilities*, including education, health, and nutrition; (b) *access to resources and opportunities*, including access to economic assets, such as income and employment, and to political opportunities, such as gender representation in political bodies; and (c) *security*, including reduced vulnerability to violence and conflict. Together, these dimensions contribute to women's individual well-being and enable women and girls to make strategic choices and decisions, that is, to be *empowered*. (ADB, Manila 2006)

But recently, considerably more thought has gone into what gender equality in education should entail. Herz (2004) was one of the first to present a simple formula for improving gender equality in education: making girls' education affordable, making education a practical reality, making schools more girl-friendly and improving education quality. UNESCO developed a Gender Equality Framework that describes four dimensions of gender equality in education – equality of access, equality in the learning process, equality of educational outcomes and equality of external results – reinforcing the need for bringing gender equality *to, within and through* education. The framework describes what each of these dimensions means, *particularly for girls*, and also illustrates practical steps education authorities can take to put them into practice.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE – PROGRESS

Gender parity in education is a fundamental human right, a foundation for equal opportunity and a source of economic growth, employment and innovation. The Dakar Framework for Action set bold targets for overcoming gender disparities, some of which have already been missed. Even so, there has been progress across much of the world in the past decade. Viewed from a global perspective, the world is edging slowly towards gender parity in school enrolment. Convergence towards parity at the primary school level has been particularly marked in the Arab States, South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa –the regions that started the decade with the largest gender gaps. To put this progress in context, if these regions still had the gender parity levels of

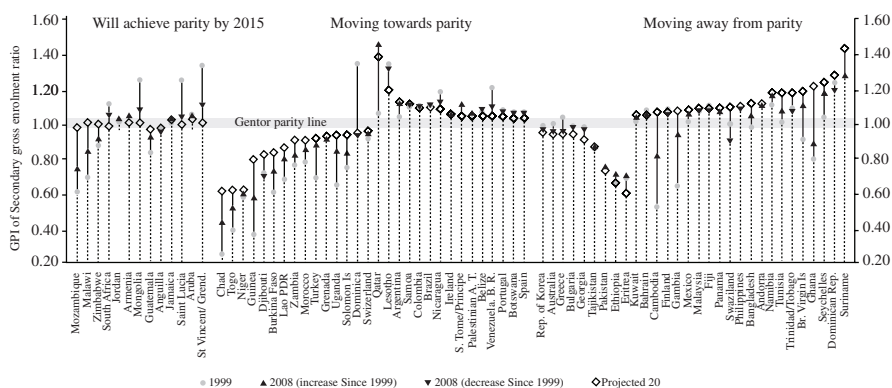
1999, 18.4 million fewer girls would be in primary school Goal 5 suffers from poor design.

Eliminating gender disparity in enrolment at both primary and secondary level by 2005 – the original goal – was overambitious and was accordingly missed by a wide margin. Achieving gender equality in access and achievement by 2015 seemed to be a more credible ambition but as of 2013 knocking the door this also seems to be in vein.

The poor countries will not achieve the target without radical shifts of policy and priorities in education planning. Equal access to and progression through primary school is an obvious requirement for gender parity. But progress also requires interventions at the secondary school level. Regional challenges vary. While sub-Saharan Africa has seen a marked increase in female secondary school enrolment, albeit from a low base, gender parity has not improved. In the Arab States, progress towards gender parity in secondary schools has lagged behind progress at the primary school level.

Data gaps make it difficult to provide comprehensive answers to questions like, How many countries have not yet achieved gender parity in education and where will they be in 2015 if current trends continue? As per the EFA report 2011, in fifty-two countries, the ratio of girls to boys – that is, the gender parity index (GPI) – gross enrolment ratios is 0.95 or less at the primary school level, and twenty-six countries have a primary GPI of 0.90 or less. Of the forty-seven countries not yet at parity with enough data for a projection to 2015, most are moving in the right direction, but thirty-eight will fall short of the target. Some countries that are off track for gender parity have nonetheless made substantial progress since 1999. For example, in Yemen there were almost two boys for every girl in primary school in 1999, but by 2008 the ratio of boys to girls had fallen to 1.3. Other countries that are off track, such as Côte d'Ivoire and Eritrea, have made little or no progress in narrowing large gender gaps since 1999. The regional and subregional averages mask more than they reveal of the underlying problems. Educational reality in Asia, home to close to 60 per cent of the world's children, is characterized by high levels of disparity across and within countries. While some countries have achieved near universal participation in basic education, others have continued to lag, particularly those in the South Asian peninsula.

The picture in secondary education is more mixed, and prospects for gender parity by 2015 are less promising. Only about a third of all countries with data have achieved gender parity in secondary school and in many countries significantly fewer girls than boys are enrolled. In 2008, twenty-four countries in sub-Saharan Africa and three in South and West Asia had GPIs in secondary school enrolment of 0.90 or less – and ten had GPIs of less than 0.70. Of the



Notes: Only countries that did not achieve gender parity by 2008 are included. Determination of progress towards gender parity is based on the difference and the direction between observed 2008 and projected 2015 values. For Anguilla and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, 2000 data are used for 1999 (unavailable). Sources: [Figure 1.32 ub EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011.] EFA Global Monitoring Report team calculations; Annex Statistical Table 7; UIS database.

Figure 1: Prospects for achieving gender parity in secondary education by 2015 are low for many countries. Gender parity index of secondary gross enrolment ratio, 1999, 2008 and projected values for 2015

seventy-four countries that had not achieved gender parity and had the data needed for a projection, only fourteen are on track to eliminate their gender disparities by 2015. Policies aimed at overcoming gender disparities are most likely to succeed when they are part of an integrated strategy. Bhutan has achieved deep cuts in the number of children out of school, and dropout rates have declined more rapidly for girls than boys: 95% of girls starting primary school in 2008 were expected to reach the final grade. The country's success can be traced to a multipronged attack on gender disparity through a range of programmes (Bhutan Ministry of Education, 2009; Narayan and Rao, 2009).

Classroom construction and teacher redeployment have brought schools closer to communities. The establishment of community primary schools in remote areas has been particularly important, as more parents are willing to send girls to school when classrooms are closer to home. Infrastructure investment has been backed by targeted school health and nutrition programmes and the expansion of non-formal education. The number of learners in non-formal centers tripled from 2000 to 2006, with 70% of participants being young women. Each country needs to carry out its own assessment of the barriers to gender parity. Reducing distances between communities and schools – as in Bhutan – removes a key barrier to girls' enrolment by helping allay parental concerns over security and by reducing tension over how time is shared between school and home (Lehman et al., 2007; National Research Council and Panel on Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries, 2005). In Burkina Faso,

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the development of rural satellite schools has brought education much closer to local communities and reduced gender gaps. In Ethiopia, a large-scale classroom construction programme in rural areas played a vital role in pushing up school attendance and reducing gender disparities. Targeted programmes and financial incentives can also help counteract gender disparities. Countries such as Bangladesh and Cambodia have provided scholarships for girls' education, and Nepal has specifically targeted girls from low-caste groups for support (UNESCO, 2010a).

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INDICATORS OF GENDER DISPARITY IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

ENROLLMENT OF MORE BOYS THAN GIRLS: Gender disparities originate at different points in the education system. Understanding the profile of the disparities is a crucial step in the development of any strategy aimed at achieving the targets set in goal 5. In many countries, gender gaps start to open on day one of a school career. Three-quarters of the countries that have not achieved the gender parity goal at the primary level enroll more boys than girls at the start of the primary cycle. In Mali, for example, the male gross intake rate is 102% while the rate for girls is 89%. Unless the imbalance is corrected later through higher survival rates for girls, the inevitable result of an unequal intake is a permanent gender bias in primary school.

Once children are in school, gender disparities are shaped by progression patterns. In some countries with significant gender gaps in enrolment, survival rates to the last grade are close to gender parity. In Burkina Faso, more than 70% of both boys and girls entering primary school survive until the last grade, and in Ethiopia girls are more likely to reach the last grade. With this type of pattern, gender disparities observed in school mirror intake disparities. In other countries, gender differences in intake are reinforced as children progress through school. For example, Guinea has high dropout rates for boys and girls alike, but when it comes to reaching the last grade of primary, boys have an advantage of ten percentage points.

TRANSITION TO SECONDARY EDUCATION: Gender disparities in secondary education can be tracked back to disparities in primary school. While there are exceptions, in most countries girls who have completed primary education have the same chance as boys of making the transition to secondary education. Once in secondary school, however, girls are often more likely to drop out. This is true even for Bangladesh, where government stipends have helped turn a large gender gap in favour of boys in the transition to secondary school into a gap in favour of girls. However, the disparity in

favour of girls shrinks rapidly with progression through school so that the completion rate is 23% for boys and 15% for girls. Moreover, boys outperform girls in the lower secondary school exam (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, 2008). The policy challenge for Bangladesh today is to increase male transition rates to secondary school while cutting female dropout rates.

RATIONING OF RESOURCES AMONG CHILDREN: Tackling gender disparities in secondary school poses many challenges. Some of the barriers to gender parity at the primary level are even higher at the secondary level. Secondary schooling is far more costly, often forcing households to ration resources among children. Where girls' education is less valued, or perceived as generating lower returns, parents may favour sons over daughters.

SECURITY OF GIRLS: Early marriage can act as another barrier to secondary school progression. Parents may also worry more about the security of adolescent girls because secondary schools are often far from home than primary schools.

INITIATIVE'S FOR ENSURING GENDER EQUALITY

Governments, non-governmental organizations and donor agencies have been working intensively during the last decade and a half to improve girls' access to formal education. These initiatives have had a clear positive impact, drawing more girls into the realm of schooling. Total numbers of girls going to school have swelled everywhere, even if in some countries many girls are still left out. But there is an increasing realization that it is necessary to go beyond merely providing access to education.

Many countries have established laws and mechanisms to provide free education for all, reinforcing equality among gender, class, caste, ethnic, linguistic and regional affiliations. Yet, as the Dakar Declaration and several other international conventions emphasize, it is necessary to create a comprehensive rights framework for providing education on a non-discriminatory basis, with gender equality as an integral requirement in all policies and programmes. To be effective, this framework has to be supported adequately by legislative measures. This has been seen in attempts at 'gender mainstreaming' within education systems. These attempts have included gender audits, gender budgeting and other such instruments that have come into vogue. But such policy formulations are not sufficient if suitable institutional mechanisms are not created to oversee and monitor the policies. The Lao People's Democratic Republic, Nepal, has set up specific bodies tasked with

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monitoring gender parity in education. Indonesia has created a dedicated unit within the education ministry responsible for ensuring that gender equity is planned for and monitored, in consultation with the Coordinating Ministry of Women's Empowerment. One example of good practice that stands out was undertaken in Cambodia: The Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport developed a model of gender mainstreaming to enhance the country's gender equality educational outcomes. A Quality Assurance Scheme was initiated to apply standards to a range of areas. An Inter-ministerial Gender Working Group and a Steering Committee on Gender and Girls' Education report regularly on progress in achieving Goal 5 of the EFA. A Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Plan with both qualitative and quantitative indicators was disseminated to central, provincial and district education staff. A range of affirmative action strategies were undertaken to encourage a supply of future female teachers and administrators. Gender responsiveness was one of six core dimensions implemented in child-friendly schools. Gender assessments were carried out in 24 provinces with impressive results. These included a female trainee intake of more than half. (Presentation by Cambodia at UNGEI meeting, Nepal, 2008)

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IMPROVING SCHOOL EQUALITY WITH A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

This area explores inequitable practices within schools. These are more challenging, as they include levels of teacher attention, expectations and valuing; differential treatment within the classroom (e.g., seating arrangements, delegation of chores); and often unequal access to school spaces, resources and facilities. Are programmes and strategies in place to counter the negative effect of such factors that cause inequity in quality? Are they addressing hard-to-reach children and minority and indigenous children, especially girls? Many countries realize that the quality factor is missing, and in parts of Asia-Pacific there have been innovative practices to overcome the rote learning aspects of traditional teacher-oriented education. These involve:

CREATING CHILD-FRIENDLY / GIRL-FRIENDLY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS: Studies show that a large number of boys and girls leave school midway through their education because of the uncongenial conditions in many schools. So, more attention must be paid to making the school environment child- and girl-friendly. Using the agency of the teacher to transform classroom processes with a gendered perspective requires a fundamental shift in school governance. The real test of a safe environment

lies in the attitude of the teachers, the way they deal with children and steer their classrooms. Though workshops for teachers are periodically organized in most countries, they have yet to become vehicles that effectively implement a transformative agenda with the long term goal of influencing the attitudes and values of teachers and administrators, both male and female. This becomes a major challenge because it requires new skill sets and attitudes among all the stakeholders: In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the LABEP project (Lao-Australia Basic Education Project) focussed on creating an integrated quality education improvement system. The primary goal of the project was to improve access of girls from ethnic minority groups to five years of primary school. Several strategies were applied to ensure a girl-friendly environment. Community mobilization took place to raise awareness of the importance of education. This was followed materials development that included age-appropriate learning materials, especially for children who did not speak the national language, a common barrier for minority children, in particular girls. Further steps were taken to improve the quality of pre-service training for teachers and local trainees drawn from the same ethnic minority groups to better understand and apply child-friendly practices. Results showed LABEP increased access and retention rates significantly and that more minority girl children were attending and remaining at school, even at double the national survival rates. (UNGEIE , 2008)

OVERCOMING SYSTEMIC BIASES IN THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS: It is well recognized that many social perceptions and biases that cause gender inequality are systemic and perpetuated intergenerationally through the school system. How can teaching-learning processes and interactions, both within the school and outside, be transformed so the school becomes the springboard for eliminating systematic gender biases and prejudices? This, indeed, is a challenge. As children move to secondary and tertiary levels, for example, biases begin to operate in different ways, taking the form of differential provision of optional courses of study and special classes for boys and girls. More attention is needed to provide girls with the facilities and conditions they need to learn what will be meaningful and empowering, to prepare them for employment on an equal footing with their male counterparts and to enable them to stay in school: In Bangladesh, in-service training is enhanced through a 12-month Certificate in Education course that includes a unit on gender issues, providing teachers with a method of exploring their own practice and developing more inclusive teaching approaches. In Bhutan, UNESCO's Embracing Diversity: Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments is integrated into the existing pre-service education

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in modules that help teachers understand the learner and improve aspects of gender stereotyping; encourage girls to take more non-traditional subject matter; understand violence abuse and harassment; make the school organization more girl and child friendly; as well as promote extracurricular activities that attract girls. (Heijnen-Maathuis, 2008).

CONCLUSION

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Analyses made in the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, 2011* and MDG evaluations present a mixed picture of progress towards achieving gender-related goal by 2015. But one cannot ignore that *enrolment rates for girls are rising in all countries, and gender disparity is falling in almost every country of the region*. These gains are evident in some of the poorest countries. A few decades ago, girls constituted only one third of the total enrolment in primary schools. Today the gender gap has considerably narrowed, with nearly equal numbers of boys and girls in school, and some countries of East Asia show a reverse gender gap, with more girls than boys enrolled. These achievements deserve celebration. But the task of achieving gender equality is far from complete, and the above-described remaining persistent challenges may be more difficult to overcome.

It demands a better understanding of the complex situation and a better grasp of the design and implementation of more innovative strategies. There are many events that have preceded and contoured the course of action – some located in the family, some located in the community and the peer group, and many located in the school. Understanding exclusion demands exploring these turns and twists in the personal life history of the child. Such an exploration cannot be done simply by asking questions of parents and teachers, or even of the children themselves. It requires following children individually and in groups as they enter school, move up through the grades or leave school altogether – the only way to gather the information needed to build a description of the complex processes involved in exclusion and delineate the underlying causes. Programmes to address this process will have to be linked to local dynamics that surround children at home, in the community and in the school. Support to the girl child, in particular, will have to follow the flow of her life, over a sustained period of time and through the transforming events that surround her.

It should be recognized that bringing all girl children to school is not merely an educational action. It transforms attitudes and behavioural dynamics of society, so that gender equality is seen as a value in itself worth pursuing. This cannot be achieved by traditional short-term projects. Rather, it demands sustained and long-term engagement by the state, as well as civil society.

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