

Living the MDGs

Elaine Unterhalter & Charley Nussey

In 2000 the UN General Assembly adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Ten years later, with the end point for the MDGs looming in 2015, there has been in depth discussion on the successes and failures associated with the MDGs as part of reviewing what should replace them. Two goals – MDG2 and MDG3 – deal with gender and education. MDG 1 deals with reducing poverty. Since *Equals* started publication in 2003, it has documented work on implementing the

MDGs as well as debate about a global project on gender equality and education. This issue of *Equals*, *Equals 27*, contains articles inspired by the subject of a four-year research project, the *Gender, Education and Global Poverty Reduction Initiatives* (GEGPRI) project, which set out to work with a multi-country team of researchers to look in depth over four years at how MDG 1, 2 and 3 were being implemented in Kenya, South Africa and selected global organisations.

“[The MDGs] force us to think about it...from the meetings I have attended, gender is always a big thing,”
South African Official

“They give us something to work towards, and they give us a hope”
Kenyan Official

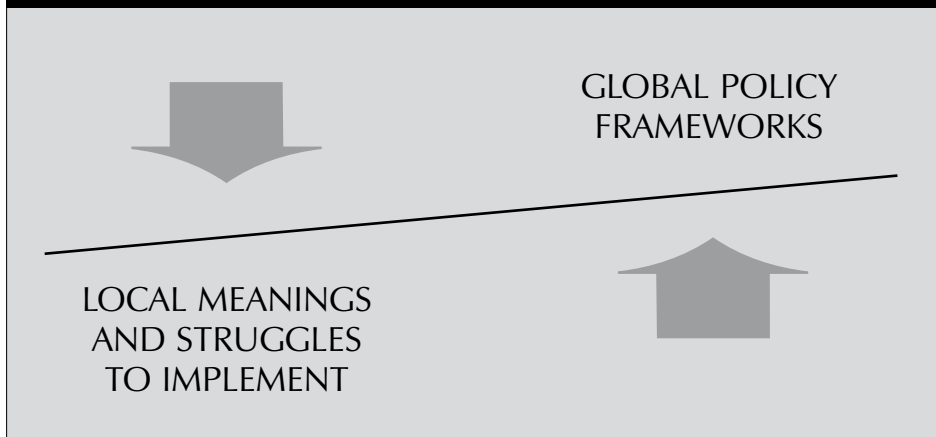
“The MDGs [are] on everybody’s lips.” UN Agency worker



Researching in Kenyan school

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Kenya and South Africa were chosen as the countries in which research was to be conducted because they have made a commitment, since 2000, to expanding education provision for the poor and implementing gender equality in education. The research project looked at the ways in which people working in education in different settings engaged with the idea of the MDGs and national initiatives

on gender, poverty and schooling. In depth interviews, discussions, and work practices were documented in five places in each

country – the national Department of Education, a provincial office, a school serving a poor community on the outskirts of a large town, a rural NGO, and a NGO working in a large city networking with global organisations. Professor Wayne Hugo, of the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, described the project at its final dissemination meeting in Johannesburg in April 2011 as undertaking an examination of the relationship of the smallest parts to the greatest whole, allowing a lived engagement with the MDGs, which has hitherto not been possible.

“These goals keep the government and NGOs, all of us, on our toes. If we had no goals, we would go back and be in our own comfort and pretend everything is OK.”

Kenya Ministry of Education

The first headline finding from the project was that the MDGs connected together only some organisations that centred on a global hub linked to UN agencies and aid disbursement. These networks took in some but not all people working in the national Department / Ministry of Education and the global NGO in each country. For some the MDGs were valuable because they hold governments to account; as one Kenya Ministry of

Education official said: “These goals keep the government and NGOs, all of us, on our toes. If we had no goals, we would go back and be in our

own comfort and pretend everything is OK.” However, the further away from the global hub organisations were situated, the less staff felt comfortable in describing their work in relation to the MDGs. This trend was much clearer in Kenya than in South Africa, possibly reflecting a stronger sense of connection to global agendas and confidence to talk about them in South Africa. However at the school in South Africa, the MDGs were seen as very far away, the head teacher, when asked if he knew about them said “I heard about it but I’ve never given my time to get an explanation about it

because it’s never touched [me].” Similarly in the rural NGO in South Africa, one project worker said about the MDGs, “I think they’re good. [... but] I don’t know what they are right now’.

A second key finding was that the connections the MDGs had sought to build between targets in education, poverty, and gender equality were not well understood. In some education departments, the schools and the rural NGO, staff did not see their work connecting poverty and gender, but rather as working on either one or the other.

As one Kenyan MoE official said, “we have not tackled the issue of poverty because it is not in our mandate.” An official in South Africa highlighted that the indicator culture had secured action only on what was measured: “we don’t have an indicator on how many girls are raped in schools. We’re not tracking that. So what is not measured does not get done...What we have found is that [the] indicators drive what becomes important...And that’s where the money goes to.” Thus narrow targets to measure gender parity meant that more substantive issues that dealt with aspects of gender equality, such as violence against women, were not being examined. Teachers and education department staff were also working in very pressured environments, and often emphasized that even if they would like to work on gender issues, the working hours to do so were very limited. As one South African department official said: “I think at the moment we’re so bogged down in getting kids to school, getting quality of teaching, getting kids to read...we’re so bogged down with those basic issues at the moment that they tend to overpower the gender issues.”

For staff in the global NGO where there was a sense of the connection between addressing poverty and

Key findings	Suggested Actions for change
1. Disconnected MDGs, other global frameworks, and local experiences	i. Build local spaces to discuss the post 2015 agenda ii. Reconnect the global agenda on poverty, gender and education
2. Lack of professional knowledge to work on gender and poverty in education	i. Develop and document courses for professional & work-based learning ii. Provide adequate support to staff, including building networks
3. Research & policy on poverty, gender and education do not connect	i. Develop a research programme that integrates gender, education and poverty ii. Develop policy on gender, education and poverty that’s informed by practice

working on gender equality, there was often uncertainty about how to make this work in education. Because of this lack of professional knowledge in all sites of how to make these connections, staff often had recourse to stereotyped views of poor girls, or the effects of poverty on communities.

A third key finding was that in many research sites – with the exception of the global NGOs and the South African Department of Education – there was a tendency to blame the poor for problems of children not attending school or achieving well. There was little in depth understanding of the

conditions poor families struggled with and some of the gender issues that arose.

The research thus highlighted the need for much more education, training, and in-depth study to allow staff to see the connections between poverty, gender inequality, and difficulties in realizing Education for All.

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This article draws on work by the whole GEGPRI research team, and the authors both acknowledge the contributions of, and extend their thanks to Dr Jenni Karlsson, Prof. Jane Onsongo, Veerle Dieltiens, Amy North, Chris Yates, Herbert Makinda and Setungoane Letsatsi.

The executive summary and full report of findings from the project can be downloaded from: <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/research/26514.html>

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GEGPRI project partners



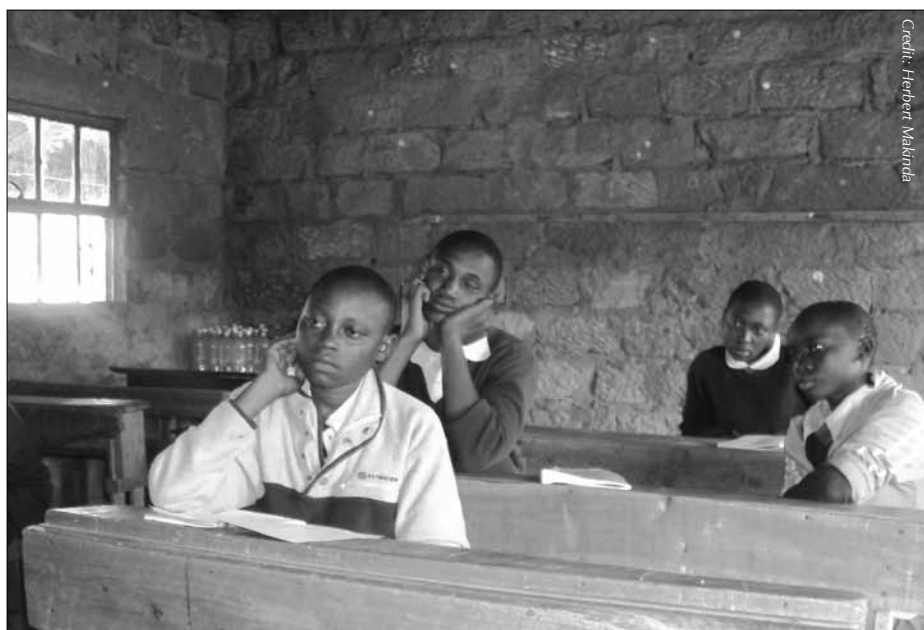
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Punishment and care – responding to poverty in Kenya

Herbert Makinda

A university team researching poverty in a school working with children from a slum does not have an easy task. When the study started teachers saw us as outsiders. They welcomed us as guests from the university, but were slightly apprehensive that we were “coming to know something.” They mainly thought that members of the research team could be of help in solving problems of poverty, and asked for donations without worrying about a relationship of dependency. However, this stance was mixed in with some more openness as some teachers were studying part time at the university and felt they could talk more freely about poverty.



Credit: Herbert Makinda

Students in Kenya often miss school to help support their families

Poverty and schooling are highly politicised issues. Free Primary Education (FPE) was a hot topic during the run up to the general elections in Kenya in December 2002, and was one of the campaign platforms of the National Rainbow Coalition team, who won the election. FPE aimed to increase access to education for many poor children. The government allocated \$10 to every learner in public school per year. This allocation has not increased since 2003, despite the dramatic rises in the cost of living. Despite FPE, school is often in fact not free, because so many levies are raised for desks, buildings and examination fees. The FPE money is given to schools in three instalments. This creates further problems as it severely hampers their ability to buy books, and teaching materials at the time when they are needed.

Thus, attempts to address poverty by abolishing school fees did not go far enough and the school could not adequately support the children’s learning. In addition parents’ poverty was very evident in the way the children dressed, their hunger and absence from school when they had to work and supplement to put food on the table. Teachers’ responses oscillated between punishment and care.

On one research visit a child was chastised after taking and eating another learner’s packed lunch. This was a common occurrence according to the teachers. They (teachers) remarked that hunger affected the ability of children to concentrate, noting this resulted in the mean examination grades for students dropping since a feeding programme had also been discontinued. In response to the challenge, a group of teachers clubbed together to buy milk bearing the responsibility of care to help the most vulnerable cases.

Poverty also intersected with gender. Teachers commented that parents sent boys to do chores for money, while girls were kept at home to look after younger children. Teachers worried that men were taking advantage of the poverty of the girls to exploit them.

Through this study we learnt that poverty is a major concern. It denies many children the opportunity to access quality education despite the interventions the government has put in place. Since the introduction of FPE was used as a campaign platform in the run to a general election, many people in the population thought FPE meant “no contribution of any nature” towards education of their children. Gradually children started dropping out, making the realization of the second millennium development goal difficult. For us to really understand the complexity of poverty, prolonged engagement with research participants is important, so that they may open up and share their experiences freely.



Herbert Makinda

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Hair braiding and phone credit – blaming poor girls in South Africa

Jenni Karlsson

In South Africa, the GEGPRI research found that it is hunger that overshadows understandings of poverty by teachers and administrators and many of the

experiences of poverty of children at school. Yet in a township school where detailed research took

place, no one took responsibility for tending the school garden, and the allotment was bare and sandy. The sad reality of schools in poor areas is that teachers often do not have the capacity to support national strategies such as school gardens, which are intended to provide fresh produce for their students and increase local food security. Initiatives such as these school gardens, or the National School Nutrition Programme, which supports poor school communities with a free nutritious meal, address poverty in material terms.

For many poor children this meal is vital to increased concentration and better grades.

But the initiative, important as it is, fails to address the deeper social arrangements that entrap children in generational cycles of poverty.

A national response to poverty has partly been attempted through a means tested

cash transfer to the poorest families. A Child Support Grant gives a monthly payment of 270 Rand, equivalent to \$34, to the mother of a child until the

'It's hunger... I'm telling [you]: chronic hunger! You can even smell hunger when you walk closer to the child.'

South African District Education Official,
16th February, 2009

and offers vital welfare support to

poor girls. However, in many of the discussions held among teachers, school management committee members, NGO workers and parents, people did not welcome the Child Support Grant as a national initiative to reduce poverty.

Instead young women who receive the grant were vilified – it is alleged that

'This grant is enough for them to do their hair; it's enough for the airtime and to pay for the cell phone at the store. Granny doesn't get anything from it.'

Female community member, Focus Group,
18th March 2008

they become pregnant to receive the grant, or spend it on hair braiding and phone credit, rather than on their children. Older women also blamed young girls, whom they portrayed as spending this money on themselves rather than giving it to their older female relatives, who support them raising their children.

Teenage pregnancy among poor girls, however, is a far more complex phenomenon than girls' vanity and the pursuit of pocket money for little luxuries. In rural areas particularly, poverty-stricken parents without access to social grants may condone their daughters engaging in transactional sex in order for the family to make ends meet. The research team found that many community members, teachers

'It's always the girls engaging in affairs with older men for material benefits or so that they could get some money. But the sad part is that, that it's not just that they get money, they get pregnant...' Provincial Education

Department officer, Interview,
4th February 2009

and education officials often apportioned blame to poor girls for becoming pregnant or squandering the Child

Support Grant. There appeared to be few opportunities for them to find space to discuss underlying causes that sustain poverty and gender inequality either with each other or with the girls and their families. This points to a recommendation from the research study regarding expanding the teacher education curriculum to include material on poverty, and opportunities for those going to work in the education sector to understand the interplay between poverty and gender inequality, and help students move away from simple stereotypes regarding girls from the poorest families.



Credit: Jenni Karlsson

Cooking in a temporary outdoor kitchen in a rural primary school, South Africa



Jenni Karlsson

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The MDGs & global organisations: defining gender and education in a narrow way

Amy North

Global organisations have been key advocates for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Confidence has not fallen in their capacity to further development, and the MDGs continue to shape conversations about gender equality, poverty and education.



Herding goats in Karero, Kenya, and missing formal education

Ten key figures working on gender, education and poverty reduction in large NGO global coalitions and multi-lateral organisations were interviewed. They saw the MDGs as key levers to get things done. This was particularly true for those who work in organisations where leadership on gender issues was weak. For them, the MDGs provide a form of external legitimacy to developing a focus on gender in education work. One said the MDGs have “been a very valuable framework... to call others to account, but also to really emphasise the urgency of the situation, particularly in relation to girls.”

However, some participants felt that the MDGs do not go far enough. The goals

do not allow a full discussion of gender equality, particularly in relation to the targeted focus on gender parity. The focus on parity, they felt, “is defining gender in an incredibly narrow way as just about enrolment. It’s even defining education in an incredibly narrow way.”

Gender was understood differently by those working within and across complex institutional spaces, and debates were not always resolved. One explained: “there are some people who are keen to have girls go to school and stay in school so that they become better housewives”, while “there are others who [understand girls’ education in terms of] economic returns for other people – it’s not

about the girls themselves.” A view of the need to make education in touch with girls’ needs was not shared in all institutions.

Institutions are hard to change. Most participants spoke about attempts to mainstream gender through their work. Too often, however, separate gender and education aims were brought together, and gender was not institutionally embedded, so that gender could be considered throughout their education programming, and in organisational processes and hierarchies. Many spoke of the need for adequate resources to enable mainstreaming to happen, supported by strong leadership and political will from the top of the organisation.

Global organisations were keen on collaboration, within their own organisations, between global organisations and between different global and local partners. However, some pointed out that efficiency, and not girls’ rights, often became the focus of collaborations, and some felt that partnerships had not lived up to their potential. Building stronger links with the global women’s movement is an important step forward for the development of a wide global coalition, built around shared concerns with women’s and girls’ rights, and gender equality in and through schooling.

Amy North

Amy North works in the field of gender, education and international development. Her particular interests are in global policy on gender and education and the role of international organisations, women’s literacy and adult education.

Kenyan Viewpoint: talking as a role model

Lois Pulei

For developing countries such as Kenya, goals such as the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger (MDG 1) are very difficult to achieve. Poverty is a huge problem in Kenya, and the gap between the rich and the poor is growing wider. The policy makers and employers in the government sectors and some private sectors are affected by tribal favoritism, fraud, and corruption, challenging the efforts to improve conditions in the country and hence widen the gap between the poor and the rich. The Ministry of economic development planning in Kenya recently noted that rising corruption slowed down economic growth in their economic survey of the country for both this year and last year.

The possibility for gender equality is also very much wanting. These issues are more pertinent in remote parts of Kenya, especially in communities such as the Maasai community, the community that I grew up in. The education prospects of girls are affected by cultural practices such as female genital mutilation, forced early marriages, lack of interest by parents in the education of their girls, and nomadism which forces families to migrate from areas where schools are accessible, to areas where pastures are suitable for their livestock. The practice of marrying girls early to replace the cows lost in drought, or to pay for a boy's education, is more common in increased poverty. The burden of care also falls on girls, as well as the collection of water or firewood. I myself experienced this kind of culture around my own schooling.

Issues such as forced early marriage or nomadism affect both the rights to and

rights within education, particularly for girls. They increase the challenge of empowering the nomadic community to get out of poverty. Girls are more affected as they are considered assets for material gain by the poor and married off at early stages of life. As a role model, apart from my official work of coordinating early childhood activities in Kajiado Central District in Kenya, I go round educating and mobilizing communities on the importance of education, especially for the girl child. It is worth mentioning that when I go for capacity building to the community I concentrate on the Maasai, since I am among the few children from that community who have gone to school. The majority of their children are still herding cattle and go through the cultural practices. I always feel that if I talk to them in our mother tongue while indicating my level of education and social achievements I might inspire them to take their children to school.

In the photographs below I am stressing the role of education as one of the ways to eradicate poverty. Though the women were there, the seating arrangement is always men on one side and women on the other, and the speaker talks in the middle. In this community, men and women sit separately and women are not allowed to address meetings in the presence of men. Men only listen to me because I have gone to school. In many poor communities, poor women have no voice and men make the decisions. My view is that this is a culture that can only be changed by education.

In Kenya, national statistics mask the reality of schooling, as many girls and boys drop out, or were not registered at birth especially in the interior community. We need community-based research on poverty and gender to provide a true reflection of the proportion of girls in school. NGOs also need to revisit their policies and interests to try to meet the needs of the community. We need to share our knowledge and ideas so that the impact is felt at the grassroots level.

Lois Pulei

Lois Pulei works as a District Early Childhood Co-ordinator, in Kajiado Central, Kajiado County, Kenya.



Credit: Lois Pulei

Stressing the role of education as one of the ways to eradicate poverty

Shot through with power: local understandings of women's empowerment

Elaine Salo

It is important to emphasise that education is essential for women's empowerment in Southern contexts. However, we need to ask how local understandings of gendered personhood impact upon the reception of universal education in local contexts, and what structural factors limit the potential of empowerment through education.

For young black women like me, growing up under the old apartheid system, education was one of the few means to social empowerment and economic independence. Educated women can be recognised as community leaders and as agents in our own right, outside of marriage and childbearing. Educated women challenge the prevailing understandings of what it means to be a woman, expanding it beyond reproductive and nurturing roles. Education for women and girls becomes acceptable because it enhances the economic statuses of households. However education still competes with reproduction and nurturance as the sole defining characteristic of women's personhood. Education provides a precious cultural resource, which, in a supportive context, can lift people out of poverty. We need policy protocols and directives to impose women's and girl's rights to education. However, in practice, increasing educational access is a complex process that spans the local, national and global arenas, and very different social contexts.

In my role as a feminist anthropologist, I wonder about the role that local understandings of gendered identities play in the realisation of goals such as universal education. These seemingly unproblematic universal contracts on socio-economic and cultural goals, such as education, health, or absence of violence, in fact mask huge debates on gender and femininity at the local level. Research projects such as the GEGPRI project need to recognise the importance of identifying this issue. In the GEGPRI study, we find policymakers working in and through multiple global, national and local arenas and diverse audiences, as they legislate and implement gendered access to education. When these universalised goals falter or remain unrealised, the following

questions should arise as we look at the data and measures about target indicators:

- What competing constructs of gendered personhoods co-exist in these multiple arenas?
- What are the constructs of personhood that operate in these various levels and arenas?
- How do these constructs impact upon actors' sense of self and agency?
- How do these actors embody these constructs, across different contexts?
- How do policymakers especially those located in the South negotiate these?
- How are policymakers and advocates constrained or assisted by these multiple notions of gendered personhood?
- How does the embodiment of competing, juxtaposed notions of gendered personhood impact upon the implementation and realisation of development goals such as universal education?

To answer the questions above, more detailed research is needed into the ways in which gendered identities are constructed across the bureaucracies in local and global contexts. We need to understand further how policymakers and advocates for increasing gendered access to education, embody, negotiate, reinforce or challenge these understandings of identity.

Shula Marks' classic ethnographic study (1994) on the history of nursing in South Africa¹ speaks to the manner in which nurses are not only health professionals but carry or communicate the 'appropriate' moral codes of conduct in local communities. The tensions between the different approaches to health may well limit messages of say, safe sex to gay men, or of reproductive rights to adolescents.

I recall how, during my research on

gendered personhood, the conflicting portrayal of the nurse as disinterested health professional on the one hand and as moral judge on the other, played itself out in local health clinics on the Cape Flats, in Cape Town South Africa. I accompanied one adolescent woman to a local health clinic to obtain contraceptives. The nurse assisting her, challenged her about her right to be in a reproductive health clinic seeking contraceptives, saying, "you shouldn't be here, this is not the way that a young woman should behave!"

The nurse's response vigorously affirmed local notions of gendered personhood for young women that included strict celibacy and denied their sexuality. Leaders at the local level, such as the nurse, can see sexually active adolescent women who are provided contraceptives as indicative of irresponsible social mothering. For the nurse, it was easy to explain why adolescent pregnancy rates were so high! But gendered personhood is relational; and intersects with our particular raced, ethnic, class and sexual identities, as these are enacted and meaningful in different contexts.

The results of such nuanced research will point to the limits of gendered personhood and agency in these arenas, and the manner in which agency is structured. These studies will give us some insights into why seemingly universal laudable development goals such as universal education for women and girls are often difficult to implement in practice. They will also indicate how the apparently neutral language of gendered development and the actions of seemingly disinterested bureaucrats are shot through with power.



Elaine Salo

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Missing the mark on gender inequality: more of the same is not enough

Akanksha A. Marphatia

Despite global progress in girls' enrolment, gender equality remains an elusive goal. The Education For All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have often been challenged for promoting a limited gender agenda but little evidence until now, has confirmed this perspective. The GEGPRI study offers invaluable insights from research about how the strive for a common minimum denominator required to build international consensus limits the eventual outcome. Findings from case studies from Kenya and South Africa highlight that international and national policy efforts neither go deeply enough into the power and politics nor adequately address the myriad inequalities maintaining women in subordinate positions.

Framing the issue

The limited emphasis on gender, poverty and power relations in these international goals makes the possibility of overcoming these multiple inequalities highly unlikely. The EFA goals have over-emphasised access through increasing girls' enrolment rather than addressing the underlying socio-cultural barriers which maintain discriminatory practices and beliefs around gendered roles. The MDG agenda further reduced gender to two goals, striving for equal numbers rather than equitable learning experiences and success. Although the goal of halving poverty appears as an MDG objective, there is no focus on how and why people, and women in particular, become poor and are unable to access the resources and opportunities (such as good quality education) to climb out of this disadvantage. The GEGPRI study finds that the emphasis on gender inequality and human rights actively advocated in the Nairobi and Beijing Conferences has been progressively reduced to issues of parity, and a general global category of inequality is often seen only as 'women', rather than a complex interplay of other identities such as race, ethnicity and disability.

The role of INGOs

The examination of INGOs in the study reveals the complexity in connections both amongst staff working at different

levels and their differing perceptions of the relevance of global goals to their work, and the everyday lives of the excluded girls and women with whom they work. Indeed, the nature of these connections is complicated, particularly within a decentralised structure. While funding drives the timeframe of some interventions, the recent adoption of the Rights Based Approach, as in the case of ActionAid International, strives to support longer-term efforts for sustaining emphasis on gender equality and poverty reduction in education activities. In order to move beyond short-term advocacy and campaigning efforts on getting more girls into school, the focus of ActionAid's work has changed to engaging girls, parents, teachers, local civil society organisations and teachers unions in discussions. We explore why girls are out of (or pushed out of) school, how each of them perceives the role of women in society, what benefits education would bring them and their family, and current reasons why girls are not completing school.¹

In order to bridge the gap between research and practice we are aiming to better understand barriers to girls' education. For example, findings from baseline studies in the Stop Violence Against Girls in Schools Project² and the Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria and Tanzania Project³ reveal the discord between girls experiences and expectations

in school with those of their parents, teachers, and boys – providing a platform for discussing these differing perspectives. Central to these discussions will be addressing the factors which create and maintain poverty and gender inequality.

The study inspires a number of timely questions for addressing the familiar persistent challenges of gender inequality and poverty:

- Where to after 2015 has come and gone, and women continue to be excluded on the basis of their sex, ethnicity, race and socio-economic backgrounds?
- Will creating 'new goals' or extending the expired ones change the lives of girls and women for the better?
- With the renewed focus on efficiency, effectiveness and learning outcomes, is there space for more nuanced and political analysis of power structures which maintain poverty and inequality?
- How can we move beyond parity in access to address the underlying factors which result in violence against women, girls being pushed (rather than dropping out) out of school and into early marriage and the labour market?
- How can we promote efforts which recognise the 'intersecting inequalities'³ of poverty and exclusion? How do we integrate concerns of gender inequality, education and poverty into a uniting framework which addresses rights rather than needs within an intergenerational perspective?



Akanksha A. Marphatia

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¹ Marphatia, A., Edge, K., Legault, E. and Archer, D. (2010) 'Politics of participation: parental support for children's learning and school governance in Burundi, Malawi, Senegal and Uganda.' ActionAid International and Institute of Education.

² <http://www.actionaid.org/what-we-do/education/girls-education-violence>

³ <http://www.actionaid.org/what-we-do/education/transforming-education-girls-nigeria-tanzania>

⁴ Unterhalter, E. (2009) 'Gender and poverty reduction: The challenge of intersection', *Agenda* 81, 14-24.

Researching poverty, gender and education: crossing new frontiers along the right lines?

Charley Nussey

As Syliva Chant says in her introduction to the “International handbook of gender and poverty,” gender is not just about women, and poverty is not just about income. We need to expand our understandings of both gender and poverty to include relational and structural forms, as well as to understand more deeply how the two can interact.

The value of this Handbook is in the space that it gives us to reflect on the ways in which gender inequalities and poverty inequalities combine to make life for the poorest women doubly difficult, and to reflect on these inequalities within numerous social contexts. The Handbook includes information brought from the knowledge of a wide range of writers – academics, policy makers, NGO workers – and a wide range of countries. This helps us to understand the breadth of experiences of ‘being a woman’ or ‘being poor’, and the ways in which interventions attempt to address these inequalities. The Handbook is designed in such a way that it can be read chronologically to raise our understandings of poverty and gender, or we can dip in to particular articles about contexts which are particularly relevant to our work.

The Handbook moves through both theory and evidence. We are first led to think about different aspects of gendered poverty; both how they might be analysed, and measured. Reflection on new measurements often leads to neglected or hidden dimensions of poverty. In Sarah Gammage’s article, for example, time poverty is explored. We see that women across the income distribution scale are more time-poor than their male counterparts, but that aspects of household infrastructure such as water availability or fuel can greatly improve welfare. Articles such as this give clear calls for policy, and highlight how thinking beyond poverty as income can give us a very different picture of women’s lives.

The Handbook also shows clearly that what is measured globally in terms of gender (in)equality is not yet full enough. Drechsler and Jütting ask why progress in gender equality has been so slow,

and answer their question in part by introducing a new composite measure (the Social Institutions and Gender Index, developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), which explores aspects of social and institutional gendered inequalities. By looking at ‘son preferences’, ownership rights, or the rates of early marriage, they give a much more nuanced picture than the gender parity targets of the Millennium Development Goals.



Carrying a heavy load in Darjeeling, India

Questions about what is measured lead nicely on to questions about what interventions are in place. Here too, we are encouraged to engage critically with our assumptions about what works. Tough questions are asked by authors such as Kate Maclean or Ranjula Bali Swain, who explore whether instrumentalist policies for women’s empowerment such as micro-

finance or conditional cash transfers are driven more by pragmatism and ease of delivery than by social justice, and whether such interventions actually benefit women. These articles open space for improvement of interventions through debate.

While the scope of this handbook is impressive, it is the final section, which deals with ‘new frontiers’ of research, that I found the most refreshing. Recently I went to a thought-provoking conference about inclusive education in the Commonwealth countries, which began to address some of the historical absences in inclusion discussions, such as education for disabled girls in contexts of poverty. Yet I left frustrated that issues of sexuality were not raised more fully, when that very week I had been asked to sign a petition about proposals to make homosexuality illegal in Uganda. Education policies and debates need to face issues, regardless of whether they are deemed ‘controversial’, and fully challenge all forms of discrimination. This Handbook does not shy away from the contentious questions. Work by Susie Jolly and Andrea Cornwall, for example, in the final part of the volume, goes some way to explore the ways in which gender in anti-poverty strategies is generally understood within the context of heterosexual relationships, and male-headed households. Thinking about the ways in which women are marginalised who do not subscribe to dominant norms of sexuality and gender is extremely important within the development context, which often perpetuates and transfers such norms.

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Monitoring Reports & meanings of gender

Keshet Bachan

Gender must not be viewed in isolation, but must be understood in relation to other forms of inequality and disadvantage. This is the important message of the Gender Review¹ of the 2011 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) by the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI), and one which is often ignored in education policy.



Being cool and working together in El Salvador

The 2011 GMR is guided by the Education For All (EFA) goals and by instrumentalist arguments in favour of girls' education, which do not analyse gender comprehensively. The report ignores the issue of boys' underachievement and increased drop-out rates in some regions, leading to a misleading notion that "gender issues have ceased to exist or that gender equality has been achieved." In reality, such trends usually reveal complex gender patterns that are disadvantageous to both boys and girls. According to Plan's 2011 'Because I am a Girl: So, What about Boys' report, in some places where there has been significant improvements in some aspect of equality, such as parity in schooling, there has been little corresponding social change. Young men continue to buy into risky forms of masculinity, which can lead to increases in violence, unsafe sex, substance abuse and school drop-out. For instance in Brazil, where more girls than boys are now

finishing high school², there are currently 200,000 fewer young men alive than women due to gun related violence³.

One of the strongest policy calls from the UNGEI review ties girls' education with household poverty. UNGEI argues that "well-designed conditional cash or in-kind transfer measures" are

particularly effective. Such 'donor friendly' interventions provide an easy platform for rapid scaling and increased investment. However, such programmes will only serve to increase the numbers of girls in school. The issue of the quality of education they receive once they enter the education system requires further investigation. The focus of the GMR on parity masks the deeper gender and quality issues of schooling, and does not explore ways in which education can contribute to maintaining and even entrenching gender inequality.

The UNGEI review tackles the issue of quality education by arguing for revisions in school curricula to make them gender transformative, and encouraging a shift in focus from education inputs to education outcomes. This analytical shift in thinking changes the focus from test scores to one that measures success by whether schools address broad gender and social inequalities. This is a critical departure from previous views of school as a neutral space, to one that sees the ways in which school and education are in fact embedded in wider structures that sustain inequality such as the community and the labour market. More research is required to investigate how gender responsive curricula, increased teacher training and household level measures can all combine to produce significant results not only for girls' educational attainment but also for their ability to realize the full spectrum of their human rights.



Keshet Bachan

Keshet Bachan has been the Project Coordinator of the 'State of the World's Girls', Plan International's flagship global publication, for the past four years. Plan's 2012 'Because I am a Girl' Report will focus on girls' education as a tool for building skills for life, with a focus on the quality of girls' education.

¹ http://www.ungei.org/files/UNGEI_2011_GMR_Gender_Review.pdf

² http://portal.unesco.org/geography/es/files/13662/12960781625TOM_-_Brazil's_Ed_System_EN.pdf/TOM%2B-%2BBrazil's%2BEd%2BSystem_EN.pdf

³ Plan. (2011). Because I am a Girl: The State of the Worlds Girls – So, What About Boys?. London, UK: Author.

Forthcoming events 2012

9-11 January	Education World Forum, London UK
27 February – 9 March	56th session of the Commission on the Status of Women
1 March	Launch of UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2012
8 March	International Women's Day
19-22 April	12th AWID International Forum, Istanbul
5-7 September	2012 Human Development and Capability Association conference to be held in Jakarta, Indonesia Theme: "Revisiting Development: Do We Assess It Rightly?"

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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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Plan's 2011 'Because I am a Girl' report: so, what about boys?



Published by Plan, the annual 'State of the World's Girls' reports examine the rights of girls throughout their childhood, adolescence, and as young women. The 2011 report highlights that working towards gender equality is about the role of boys and men, not just an issue for women and girls. This needs to be better understood for us to have a positive impact on societies and economies.

Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who is the former President of Brazil and a member of the Elders, stresses in the report's foreword that fathers in particular have a key role to play in leaving old "machismo" ideas behind: "I call on all men and boys to throw their weight behind the campaign for equality and to challenge those who oppose women's rights and equality. Societies with greater equality between men and women, girls and boys, are healthier, safer, more prosperous and more truly democratic."

The report makes recommendations for action, showing policy makers and planners what can make a real difference to girls' lives all over the world:

- Start young: preschool education should promote equality between girls and boys and involve parents.

- Transform school curricula to challenge stereotypes and acknowledge difference.
- Support girls' and boys' participation in the creation of policies to improve sex education.
- Make schools safe for girls and boys.
- Launch campaigns that challenge discrimination and engage men and boys.
- Pass laws that enable both parents to take an active part in raising their children.
- Enforce legislation to end violence against women and girls.
- Legislate for equal opportunities.

<http://plan-international.org/about-plan/resources/publications/campaigns/because-i-am-a-girl-so-what-about-boys>

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