

Women's rights movements and Education For All: connections and disconnections

Joanna Hoare



Credit: Oxfam GB

Women marching for their rights in Suakoko, Liberia.

Few would argue against the idea that girls' experiences at school have a profound impact in determining the women that they later become, in terms of aspirations, confidence, and capacity to support themselves independently and stand up for their rights.

As such, one would think that campaigning for, and helping to design, education in schools to challenge dominant beliefs and practices that harm women and girls, promote gender equality, and ensure that girls leave school confident and aware of their rights would be a key aspect of the work of women's rights organisations at the local, national, and global level. But historically, this has not been the case.

Rather than working together, feminist activists and activists involved in education have often pursued parallel agendas, with women's rights groups concentrating their efforts on training and supporting adult women, and education groups leaving the campaign for women's rights to feminist groups outside the formal education sector. What are the reasons for this, and how might the two sides work together more effectively to achieve their shared goal of overcoming gender inequality and discrimination in society, and empowering girls and women?

The narrow focus of 'education for all'

When the World Bank and other big donors talk about promoting girls' education, for the most part it is in terms of getting equal numbers of boys and girls into school, as reflected in the third Millennium Development Goal. Beyond that, there is little consideration of what happens to girls (and boys) within schools, in terms of what they are taught and how they are taught it, and in terms of their safety in school. This

IN THIS ISSUE

1-3 Women's rights movements and education for all: connections and disconnections

3 Letter from the Editors

4 Establishing Links between Women's Organisations and Education For All (EFA): the work of FAWE

5 Still too far away: distance and disconnection on gender and poverty in schools

6 New partnerships for family learning

7 Economic Literacy – a tool for women's empowerment in Nicaragua

8 Viewpoint: A learning journey

9 Conference comments and recent events

10 Book reviews

11 New reports, weblinks and letters

12 The KIC Project and forthcoming events



12-year old Laxshmi attends Purvanchal Dalit Girls School in Uttar Pradesh, India. Girls' experiences at school have a profound impact in determining the women that they later become.

narrow understanding of gender equality in education also ignores informal education that takes place outside of the school space. In addition, it places emphasis on the economic value of educating girls as a means of reducing poverty, rather than talking in terms of girls' right to education, and the role that it can play in enabling girls to realise other rights later on as adult women. This narrow framework has inevitably shaped education policy at the national and school level, and the way education groups campaign.

Many educationalists find this narrow understanding of how gender equality in education should be achieved and the instrumentalist approach to justifying the education of girls restrictive, but nevertheless have found creative and transformative ways of working within it to raise girls' aspirations and support their development as individuals. But most women's rights activists and groups do not feel happy about subscribing to an agenda that seems to portray women exclusively as mothers, or potential mothers, rather than as individuals with rights, and which ignores feminist concerns about sexist curricula and the way schools can serve to uphold and strengthen negative gender stereotypes, rather than challenging them. This means that they have been reluctant to align themselves to donor-led education for all initiatives.

Bringing women's groups in?

This instrumentalist approach has also affected how women's community based organisations (CBOs) have been brought into education initiatives at the local level. Often the emphasis has been on using them to reach out and provide material and emotional support to girls who might otherwise not be able to

attend, or continue attending school, such as orphans, or girls who have become pregnant. Of course, these are important activities, but limiting the involvement of these community activists in this way ignores the formal role they could play in mentoring girls, in challenging sexist behaviour within schools, or in providing positive role models of women assuming engaged activist and leadership roles within their communities. There is often little attention given to promoting the benefits that women themselves could gain from their involvement, in terms of increased confidence, and establishing networks of solidarity with other women's CBOs doing similar work elsewhere. Again, this has meant that feminist groups with more transformative agendas have been reluctant to get involved in these sorts of activities.

It is also true that while many women's CBOs are actively mobilising around education issues at the school level –

either in terms of their children's education, or as members of women's literacy groups – they tend not to be given the

chance to connect with both national and global feminist and education campaigns and movements. Actively engaging with, and listening to, women organising around education issues at the local level is one area where the two movements could connect.

The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) is one example of a feminist group that has taken a leading role in providing education to girls and boys in very difficult circumstances, both in Afghanistan and in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan. This included running underground schools during the Taliban period. Children educated in RAWA's schools and orphanages follow a curriculum that emphasises tolerance, respect for difference, and gender equality. The organisation also campaigns for women's rights and democracy. www.rawa.org

Focusing on women's adult education

Women's rights and feminist activists and groups may traditionally have had little to do with girls' formal school-based education, but one area where there has been more overlap with education projects is women's adult education. At the tertiary level, feminist academics run courses in feminist theory, gender, and women's studies, and challenge sexism within universities. And feminist groups are also involved in basic education for women who have missed out on

schooling as children. As the case study of the Central American Women's Network's economic literacy programme in Nicaragua given in this issue illustrates, adult education can play a transformative role in changing women's lives for the better. But, as Alejandra Scampini argues here as well, this will only be the case if it is guided by an explicitly political agenda in terms of widening women's access to power and decision-making, and enabling them to claim their rights, which sits uncomfortably with the dominant focus in education on development goals and poverty reduction. This may explain why so much of the 'education' work that feminist and women's rights groups do – from leadership training to workshops on human rights – is not labelled as 'education', whilst adult education projects that are run by mainstream education organisations shy away from embracing such an openly 'feminist' agenda.

Since 1981, REPEM (Red de Educación Popular entre Mujeres – representing 150 NGOs across Latin America) has been working in coalition with popular education organisations to promote women's right to literacy through consciously feminist popular education and national and regional level campaigning. As well as enabling women to gain literacy skills using participatory teaching techniques inspired by Paulo Freire's philosophy of liberatory education, REPEM's activities have brought feminist and popular education activists together in productive alliances. www.repem.org.uy

Sorting out priorities

At the local level, women's rights organisations typically operate under difficult circumstances, with erratic and meagre funding, overstretched staff and volunteers, and often facing hostility from the communities in which they operate, particularly if they are campaigning on controversial or sensitive issues. This means having to make hard decisions about which issues to prioritise. Given the support that girls' education receives from national and international agencies, feminist activists could be forgiven for arguing that their time and resources are better deployed elsewhere. This is particularly so when one considers how crucial the issues that women's rights organisations do tend to prioritise are to limiting girls' access to education, and to other life opportunities; issues such as gender-based violence, inheritance and land rights, and child marriage.

However there are issues of shared concern between education and women's rights activists, where connections can be made

These include violence against girls particularly as schools are often places that girls associate with harassment and feeling unsafe. This is an area where there are already

There are issues of shared concern between education and women's rights activists, where connections can be made

promising signs of collaboration between women's rights and education organisations, such as the campaign against sexual bullying in schools in the UK run by WOMANKIND Worldwide (www.womankind.org.uk) and ActionAid's Stop Violence Against Girls in Schools project, in Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique (www.actionaid.org).

A recent successful campaign by civil society groups, including feminist organisations, in Mexico led to the introduction of comprehensive sexuality and HIV education into Mexican schools. Following a meeting held in Mexico city in May 2008, health ministers from other countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region came together to pledge to introduce similar curriculum changes in their countries. Although this relates to just one area of education, it shows how influential feminist (and other social) groups can be in influencing education policy in a way that brings about positive change. www.awid.org

Building connections

Sadly, existing links between those active in promoting education for all and those active in women's rights movements are

few and far between, but that is not to say that they do not exist, as the other

articles in this issue illustrate. And where they do exist – for instance,

in women's adult education projects that encourage participants to challenge gendered power relations, the involvement of women's groups in designing gender-responsive curriculum, campaigns against gender-based violence in schools – these connections can, and should, be encouraged and nurtured. Forging links and campaigning together on these issues could provide a platform for organising and working together, drawing on the strengths of both movements to bring about change in terms of making girls' experiences of school-based education more positive. Likewise, recognition needs to be given to the many women (and men) working as teachers and in other areas of education who are committed to using education as a transformative tool to promote gender equality and the rights of girls and women, beyond the narrow instrumental focus of poverty reduction, but who may be doing so in isolation, and without access to, and support from, wider feminist movements and networks.

Joanna Hoare is a PhD student in the Department of Development Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

Letter from the Editors

Welcome to this issue of *Equals*, with articles looking at the connections, and disconnections, between the women's rights movement and the education for all movement.

Growing out of the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, activism for women's rights and gender equality within development really came into its own in the 1990s, with diverse women's organisations from across the developing and developed world coming together at two important meetings. These were the 1993 Human Rights conference in Vienna, where the argument was made – and won – that women's rights are human rights, and the 1995 Women's Conference in Beijing, resulting in the Beijing Platform of Action, with its commitment to gender mainstreaming. The Beijing meeting in particular provided an important opportunity for transnational links to be established; since then, women's rights groups across the world have mobilised at the local, national, and international level to campaign on issues such as gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and conflict.

This has often meant working in alliance with other organisations and movements, but so far, this has rarely included activists working on education issues. The reasons for this are explored in some of the articles in this issue, written by education campaigners and women's rights activists, which also give examples of projects and campaigns where activists from the two movements are working together. We hope that this will contribute towards strengthening the existing links between the two movements, as well as initiating conversation on other areas where women's rights and education activists could work together.

One opportunity coming up soon is the Global Campaign for Education's Action Week in April 2009 (info available at www.campaignforeducation.org). The action week will focus on literacy; women's literacy is an important concern for many groups campaigning on women's rights, meaning that this event will provide an excellent opportunity for activists to reach out and build links with women's organisations. We hope that education campaigners will do so, and that in future, the relationship between the women's rights movement and the education for all movement will be one of connection, rather than disconnection.

Joanna Hoare, Amy North and Elaine Unterhalter



Joyce Makungu teaching a pre-school class at a centre for former street children, Mombasa, Kenya. Female teachers are important role models for girls.

Establishing Links between Women's Organisations and Education For All: the work of FAWE

Salina Sanou

The Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE) has in the last 15 years worked hard to bridge the divide between advocating women's rights and promoting and supporting girls' education through school-based activities. This is well supported by FAWE's mission to promote gender equity and equality in education in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) by fostering positive policies, practices and attitudes towards girls' education, from encouraging parents to invest in girls' education, to supporting girls who have become mothers to return to school. FAWE envisages a world in which gender disparities in education are eliminated, and all African girls have access to education, perform well and complete their studies. FAWE's vision/mission are translated through demonstrating what works on the ground (i.e. at school level) in terms of promoting gender equity and equality in education, and in influencing governments to replicate and mainstream best practices.

FAWE is a home-grown African non-governmental organization, founded in 1992 with its Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. FAWE is a membership-based organisation and has a growing network of 35 National Chapters (countries) in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). At the regional level, FAWE's membership includes women who are ministers and deputy ministers of education, female vice chancellors, senior education policy makers and prominent educationalists; at national level this membership is opened up to include all those interested in promoting



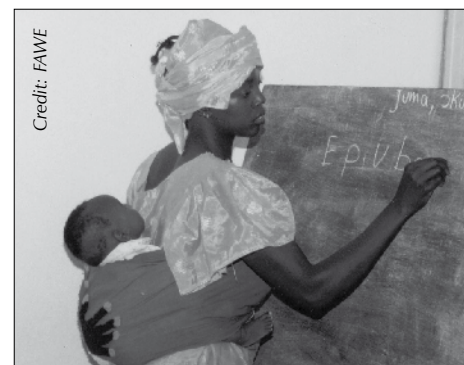
FAWE's Center of Excellence (COE) model emphasises access, retention, performance and empowerment as the four factors necessary to ensure girls' success at school

girls' education. FAWE works to encourage governments, international organizations and local communities to enact policies and provide positive learning environments in schools that treat girls and boys equally, as well as implementing programmes that support adult women's rights and enable them to return to education.

The regional network of 'Mothers' Clubs' is one of the most successful women's programmes implemented by FAWE. 'Mothers' Clubs' exist in Zambia, Gambia, Liberia and Malawi. The clubs provide adult literacy classes and income-generating activities to adult women, with proceeds from the IGAs being used to support the re-entry of out-of-school girls into

the education system, as well as to enable the women participants in the scheme to be economically independent. In Zambia and Malawi many mothers have become effective community leaders and have facilitated the return of over 45 out-of-school girl mothers to school. In Gambia, proceeds from IGAs have been used to support economically disadvantaged girls in the region, leading to improved access and retention.

FAWE's school-based interventions on the other hand, have yielded important examples of successful practices that have been incorporated into national education policies. The most successful of these interventions is the Center of Excellence (COE) (see fig. 1 below), which incorporates the following gender responsive models: TUSEME Youth Empowerment (an innovative model that uses theatre-for-development techniques to address concerns that hinder girls' social and academic development. TUSEME trains girls to identify and understand the problems that affect them, articulate the problems and take action to solve them); Science, Mathematics and Technology programme and Gender Responsive Pedagogy training in reproductive health, addressing HIV and AIDS; provision of scholarships and support to economically disadvantaged girls; provision of gender responsive infrastructure, such as separate toilet facilities for girls and boys with water/space for girls to be able to change their



A member of one of FAWE's Mothers' Clubs.

sanitary pads or wash up if need be; provision of dormitories; establishment of a gender responsive school management system and training of school management teams; activities to involve members of the community in the school operations; and harassment free zones.

Recent evaluations of the COE model have demonstrated that the model has improved access, retention and performance of girls and boys and enhanced community participation (of parents and traditional leaders for instance) in school activities. Students have been empowered to speak up and defend their right to education, for instance in cases where parents have chosen to educate their sons rather than daughters due to financial constraints, teachers are not sensitive to girls' needs within the learning environment, or in cases of sexual harassment. This has led to improved academic performance in all FAWE schools where COEs have been established. For example, at the COE in Kajiado, Kenya, the number of students transitioning from primary to secondary increased from 66% in 2000 to 100% in 2003.

The 'Mothers Clubs' programme and the school-based interventions in the COE are a clear indication of FAWE's capacity to link both women's activities and the promotion of girls' education through school-based interventions, as the mothers in the clubs are members of the community around a COE and contribute to the action plans developed to support it. As illustrated above, some of the profits from the IGA in the clubs are used to support economically disadvantaged schoolgirls in the COE. The mothers also play a role in sensitizing communities to the benefits of girls' education. While the central player at the school level is the child who is empowered to influence the creation of a gender-responsive learning environment, adult women also benefit through literacy enhancement and economic empowerment from their involvement in FAWE's activities.

Salina Sanou is Senior Programme Coordinator at FAWE. www.fawe.org

Still too far away: distance and disconnection on gender and poverty in schools

Amy North and Elaine Unterhalter

How are global initiatives, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), concerned with advancing gender equality in and through schooling being understood – and acted upon – in different contexts? Who is participating in their implementation? What sorts of connections are being made between different actors working at local, national and global levels?

Researchers in Kenya, South Africa and the UK are seeking answers to these questions through the Gender, education and global poverty reduction initiatives project. The first phase of this three year research project funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council

(ESRC) was recently completed in two schools: one in Kenya and the

other in South Africa. The investigation focused on how the schools and their communities were connecting with global and national policy processes regarding gender equality in education. Researchers were interested in the views of women's organisations and other groups, such as teacher unions and school governing boards.

In both countries, despite the schools being examples of well functioning sites managed by engaged and committed head teachers, the research revealed complex processes of disconnection from global and national initiatives regarding gender equality. Few of the participants had heard of the MDGs, and amongst those who had there was little sense that the MDGs related to their own practice or everyday experiences. The school communities had not participated in discussions of national or global policy and, although they were expected to respond to policy initiatives formulated by their governments and the global policy community, they did not feel engaged with policy making on these issues. The South African head teacher explained:

"I do hear about [the MDGs or the EFA goals] but I've never given my time to get an explanation about it because it's never touched... I've never got the real explanation about it... Actually, if you get something from far, not next to you, it's very hard."

A consequence of this disconnect was a narrow interpretation of gender equality as achieving equal numbers of girls and boys in schools. There was considerable doubt about those aspects of gender policy that troubled local interpretations of appropriate behaviour by women and men or boys and girls. This was compounded by a lack of spaces for discussion and debate around gender equality between the schools and the communities within which they are located.

In both research sites there were a number of active local organisations concerned with social development, including women's organisations, as well as church groups and

non-governmental organisations (NGOs). However it appeared that many of these

organisations did not feel it was their place to contribute to discussions about the school or gender issues more generally.

The local women's organisations spoken to by researchers were primarily concerned with income generation or supporting the sick or very poor, and this role defined their relationship with the schools. In Kenya, for example, some women in the community were organised into groups concerned with saving and micro-enterprise or providing funds to help poor children or orphans. Thus they saw their main focus as addressing the pressing concerns of poverty in their community, rather than gender equality, even though the two are so closely related.

In the context of the dealing with the impacts of poverty in and around the schools, it was clear that it is often women or girls who carry heaviest burdens. Girls' take on care duties at home, mothers accompany their children to school to deal with discipline problems or to ensure access to feeding programmes, and women's organisations are brought in to provide care and support to the needy. However, while interventions to address poverty within the school draw on women and girls as carers, concerns with addressing gender inequalities tend to be sidelined.

In both schools the head teachers and teachers expressed a firm commitment

to gender equality. However, the distance they feel from national and global policy, the overwhelming nature of poverty within the schools, and a failure to build meaningful connections with women's organisations and other community groups, has made it difficult for them to engage with gender beyond a superficial concern with counting numbers. Moving beyond this will require strengthening links between schools and global and national policy processes and reaching outwards to the community, engaging parents, women's organisations and other community groups in discussion and debate about gender inequalities and how to challenge them.

The next stages of research will work with national and provincial government and local and global NGOs in Kenya and South Africa. It is hoped that this will contribute to strengthening links between these different groups and school communities, and to building connections that support efforts to advance gender equality in and beyond education in contexts of poverty.

The Gender, Education and Global Poverty Reduction Initiatives project is a collaboration between the Institute of Education, the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya, the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The research team comprises Elaine Unterhalter, Amy North, Veerle Dieltiens, Jenni Karlsson, Jane Onsongo, Herbert Makinda and Chris Yates. More information about the project is available at www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/gegpi



Researchers Jane Onsongo and Herbert Makinda with one of the posters in a classroom in the Kenyan school

New partnerships for family learning

Leni Wild

Education Action's work in countries affected by conflict has revealed a tendency by donors and education providers to focus on the core ingredients of formal school provision (such as enrolling girls and boys in school, ensuring there are sufficient physical facilities to deliver classes, and providing formal teacher training) with less attention paid to the range of complementary activities essential to supporting children's enrolment, their retention and performance in school. In response, Education Action has focused on the promotion and facilitation of parental and community involvement in primary education. Women's groups have emerged as one key vehicle to promote this.

Education Action is currently engaged in a project in Northern Uganda (supported by the UK Department for International Development and in partnership with a local partner, Literacy and Basic Education – LBE) to promote education for women and girls affected by conflict, which puts family learning at its core. Family learning starts from the belief that parents are a child's first and most important educators. It tries to build the skills of parents to enable them to better support their children's learning.

It is estimated that 350,000 children in Northern Uganda have had their education severely hampered by nearly two decades of conflict. Women and girls have been particularly affected. Literacy rates among women in Northern Uganda are about half (27%) of the national rate (51%) and only 52% of all girls aged 5-11 are enrolled in school. Furthermore, there is evidence of negative attitudes to girls' education, with fathers and husbands often resistant to women and girls receiving education.

This project aims to promote and ensure effective learning for primary school children and their mothers. It does this through a range of activities that seek to improve parental literacy rates, build parenting skills and increase parental and community support for girls' and women's education. As part of this, and in recognition of the need for women to be organised and engaged in these issues, we have supported forty existing women's groups (with over 1200 active members in total). Members of these groups have been supported to gain literacy skills, as well as being given training in advocacy, planning and public speaking. These skills help them participate in our family learning programme, but are also useful for the wide range of other activities

they are engaged in, such as self-help projects for collective income-generating activities and campaigns against domestic violence.

Working with these groups, we have strengthened their ability to hold local decision makers to account. Through training by LBE, some groups have gone on to petition their local councils and advocate for changes to bylaws for education. For

example, in Koboko district this led to a new bylaw preventing cinemas from screening films during the day, which was encouraging children to leave school. These groups have also been empowered to influence school decision-making; for example, awareness-raising campaigns, they have successfully pressured schools to recruit female teachers.

Perhaps most significant is the role these groups have played in promoting girls' and women's education, through home visits and community meetings, as well as by facilitating the creation of learning spaces within villages where children and parents gather to engage in educational activities, such as counting games. Furthermore, they have provided support to individual women and girls denied access to education.

Women's increasing access to education

Zaituna Kanchua (19 years old) from Yumbe district was the first born of eight siblings. She was made to leave school in June 2006, aged 17, to enter into an arranged marriage in a neighbouring village. The Awuba women's group was able to facilitate her return home. She says: "I am grateful for the efforts of Awuba women's pressure group [set up with LBE's help]. I was supported to register for [my] primary school leaving examination... I have been admitted in Yumbe secondary school for secondary education. I would like to study hard and become a teacher. I will never go back to the marriage before completing my [school] education." Zaituna is still in touch with the Awuba women's group.

These groups have also been supported to build links with national organisations. For example, LBE facilitated contact between the Koboko United Womens Association and FIDA Uganda, a national federation of female lawyers in Uganda who promote women's rights; KUWA has registered women who were victims of domestic violence and referred them to FIDA.

Family learning starts from the belief that parents are a child's first and most important educators

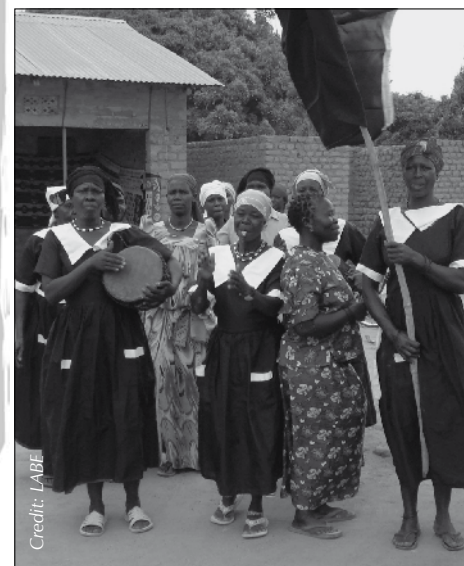
These activities are neither groundbreaking nor revolutionary. In many other countries emerging from conflict or fragile states, similar examples can be found of women acting collectively and challenging the status quo, and women who are part of these groups have emphasised the sense of solidarity, and ability to speak out, that they now

have. What is innovative is the current focus on family learning.

Women's groups

have been engaged in promoting education of mothers (and fathers) to build their ability to support their children's learning, as well as providing individual support to girls who want to remain in school. In the process, women are recognised by their communities for their role in promoting girls' education. They still encounter resistance, particularly from some male elders who resent the growing influence of these groups and the broader changes to women's place in society they represent. But overall, our project has found that many communities have welcomed involvement of women's groups in education campaigns, not least because they have revealed that these new partnerships, between women's groups, teachers, parents, communities, and school children, may contain the key to securing Education For All in the long term.

Leni Wild is Research and Development Officer at Education Action.
www.education-action.org



The Awuba women's pressure group in their uniform. The group was trained by LBE to monitor children's education. One of their success stories was enabling Zaituna, whose story is mentioned above, to return to school.

Economic Literacy – a tool for women's empowerment in Nicaragua

Marilyn Thomson

In response to requests from women's organisations for information and training on gender, globalisation and trade, Movimiento de Mujeres Maria Elena Cuadra and the Central American Women's Network worked together in Nicaragua on a project to strengthen women's economic literacy at the micro and macro levels. Participants varied in age and background, and included maquila organisers and community activists. Through

gaining a greater understanding of economic and trade issues, the women who participated in this project were enabled to

Training in economic literacy promotes wider public participation in the debate and development of economic policy, and enables women to question official agreements relating to trade and to develop their own alternative economic proposals.

promote and defend their interests, push for gendered laws (such as a new Equal Opportunities Act, passed in 2008), influence corporate, national and local government policy and practice, and advocate to curb the negative effects of free trade agreements on women living in poverty in Central America. Just as important, they also gained the skills needed to budget and manage their own household finances, and an awareness of the valuable contributions that they make to the economy. This encouraged participants to question stereotypes prevalent in Nicaragua that the economy and trade are 'men's issues' to which women have little to contribute.

MEC used popular education methods in their workshops to enable participants who do not have much formal education to make the connections between micro- and macroeconomics and the impact of globalisation at a local level. During the workshops, rather than offering solutions, the facilitators asked questions and posed problems relevant to the daily lives and experiences of the participants, who then worked together in small groups to find solutions to those problems. In this way, training in economic literacy promotes wider public participation in the debate and development of economic policy, and enables women who have received this training to question official agreements relating to trade and to develop their own alternative economic proposals.

MEC use a training method called The Wall. This is a tool for analysing the global economy from a gender perspective, which

uses women's own lived experiences as a starting point. Participants start by identifying their contribution and what they value most about being women in relation to the home, the community, workplace and organisation. Participants share their ideas and write them on paper 'stones', which they then stick on to a large paper wall, which represents the economy. In this way, participants are able to develop an understanding of the connections

between women's daily experiences and global economic trends, and how these result in

changes such as increases in the cost of living, cuts in public services, and difficulties in earning an income. Participants are also able to analyse how women and men are affected differently by economic changes.

What did you learn in the Economic Literacy Training?

We learnt how to save and to put aside money to cover housekeeping costs and how not to get into debt.

Now I know how to calculate the cost of food, transport and I understand that I can only buy clothes from time to time and usually have to buy second-hand clothes.

We became aware that housework is not valued as work.

That we are economic agents: we pay taxes and contribute to the economy.

These training methods enable facilitators to communicate complex concepts and encourage discussion of subjects often believed to be beyond the reach of women living in poverty. By making visible women's contribution to the economy, both in terms of unpaid reproductive care and housework, and the fact that women pay indirect and hidden taxes on a daily basis, participating in this training strengthens women's sense of self-worth and enables them to value their contribution to household, local and national economies.

MEC work simultaneously to change beliefs and attitudes at the personal level, to organise

women in communities and workplaces, and to influence local and national government. During the three years of this project more than 3000 women received training: ABC Economico in the first year, basic training on budgets in the second, and an advanced course on local and national budgets in the third year. Training on gender and trade has also taken place at large national events, such as MEC's annual Debate in March 2008. This event brought together over 1000 women to learn, discuss and analyse the proposed new Central America European Union Association Agreement.

The project has boosted women's self esteem and belief in their own abilities, and has provided relevant and stimulating training that has strengthened participants' capacity to organise and mobilise, and to feel that each one is an agent of change. This has helped to overcome common attitudes of apathy and incapacity, which are the effects of grinding poverty and low self-esteem resulting from gender discrimination in the home and workplace. As a result, some of the women have gone on to assume active leadership roles in their communities, organising and motivating other women, talking to them about their rights and encouraging them to participate in local activities, and representing the concerns of their neighbours in local authority forums. In this way, attaining a level of economic literacy has empowered them to stand up for their own rights, and those of other women in their communities.

Marilyn Thomson is co-director of CAWN. For more information about CAWN's activities, and to download the Briefing Paper on Economic Literacy go to the CAWN website: www.cawn.org



Members of the Movimiento de Mujeres Maria Elena Cuadra (MEC) take part in a May Day march for women's labour rights

A learning journey

Alejandra Scampini



Back in 1997, the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, (CONFINTEA V) provided an opportunity for a diverse coalition of women's rights groups and networks to discuss and promote issues crucial to promoting women's transformative education in adulthood. These efforts ensured that a feminist perspective was brought to debates and agreements made at the conference.

Some of these groups came together at the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) forum in November 2008, and will do so again at CONFINTEA VI in May 2009, in Belem, Brazil. From my perspective as a feminist and a Latin American educator (now working as a women's rights coordinator at ActionAid), I suggest that in order for these conferences to be significant for the promotion of women's rights within (and as a result of) adult education, we need to revisit and revise the challenges that we face, as well as revitalise the synergy that developed between women's rights groups and education groups at the time of CONFINTEA V.

Too much faith in Education

Education is empowering, educationalists say. Therefore, the argument goes, providing literacy and training to adult women who have missed out on education at an earlier age will automatically lead to their empowerment, regardless of other factors such as violence and discrimination that they

may face. But experience shows us that no one person can empower another. Education is only empowering if it is closely allied to the process of political struggle; this is something that future coalitions need to appreciate.

Bringing the F word back

Engaging with feminism in the fight for education for all does not just mean you 'add women and stir'. Feminists bring complexity: we are the ones seeking a transformation in the way that power is exercised throughout society, locally and globally, in public and in private, so that women's human rights can become a reality. So feminist adult education for women covers civil and political rights, such as the right to run for public office, as well as economic and

social rights, such as the right to equal pay, to belong to a union, or to have access to adequate health care and child care services. Feminism also brings the recognition of difference: the recognition and acceptance of difference within the women's movement must form a cornerstone of any education strategy, and women from diverse backgrounds need to be included in any campaign.

Going local

As we prepare to make the case for women's education in a new, more complex environment, we need to bring the experiences and voices from those on the ground. One way of doing this is to use examples of successful, transformative projects in debates on education, as well as bringing groups participating in projects or programmes into these discussions.

Non-negotiables

We need to explore the challenges we face today as women's rights advocates and agree together on a set of issues we recognize as non-negotiable, regardless of the particular issues on which we work. As I write this, women in Nicaragua and Mexico are being persecuted and harassed for advocating women's sexual and reproductive rights. Are we ready to join their struggle? The backlash against women's rights all over the world provides us with an opportunity to rebuild our platform and remove the barriers that

divide us. This could be an opportunity to recover the solidarity, spirit and vision that took us to CONFINTEA V in 1997. `

Going back to basics

The commitment of women activists in the education for all movement to women's rights is no different to that of women's rights activists in HIV and AIDS movements, or in Food Sovereignty, for instance, but for whatever reason, education as an issue has never made it on to the mainstream women's rights agenda in the way that these other issues have.

We need to create a space in which we can openly address the fragmentation that divides

us, and the challenges and opportunities inside our movements as well, both

Education is only empowering if it is closely allied to the process of political struggle; this is something that future coalitions need to appreciate

in terms of getting education onto the mainstream women's rights agenda, and of getting women's rights onto the mainstream education agenda. CONFINTEA VI and the AWID forum provide opportunities for this. The AWID forum is known for its capacity to bring diversity; complexity and intersectionality to the debates, and to provide space for voices that are often silenced, such as young women, indigenous women, LGBTQ groups, and also men. It is also a space in which conflicts within the movement are positively and constructively addressed, and which has the capacity and status to shape the global agenda regarding women's rights.

The current world economic crisis presents an opportunity to revitalise our alliances, recover the passion and celebrate new gains with other progressive movements. Those of us active in the education for all movement and the global women's movement need to build on our considerable experience of coalition building with other social movements to begin to work together to address the real issues that limit women's lives, such as chronic poverty and violence, whether or not that be in an educational context. We need to go beyond our isolated experiences of engagement with others and demonstrate our contribution to another possible world.

Alejandra Scampini is Women's Rights Coordinator at ActionAid. www.actionaid.org

Conference Comments

11th Association of Women's Rights in Development Forum Cape Town, South Africa ,14-17 November 2008

Gwendolyn Beetham

From 14 to 17 November, over 1,500 women's rights activists from around the world met in Cape Town, South Africa for the 11th AWID Forum.

The over-arching theme of the Forum was 'The Power of Movements', however, daily morning plenary discussions and hundreds of workshop sessions covered a wide spectrum of gender equality and women's rights issues – from religious fundamentalisms to gender in conflict situations, from reproductive justice to global climate change, from (dis)ability rights to generational shifts in feminist movements.

The Forum also saw several discussions new to the international women's arena, including alternatives to traditional ways of organizing, such as sports, arts and cultural activities. Issues of self-care also gained prominence, with serious (and much-needed) conversations taking place on women's rights activists' tendency to divert personal needs and care until it's too late, often leading to

'activist burnout'. Addressing these concerns, the Urgent Action Fund held a workshop called 'What's the point of revolution if we can't dance.' The session, named after a book of the same title, explored the mental, emotional and financial well-being of feminist activists. It was a highlight of the conference, and was followed later that evening by a 'Learn to Dance (like a feminist)' Afro-Brazilian dance class.

Other highlights of the four-day Forum included a demonstration, organized in conjunction with the South African One in Nine Campaign, in which thousands of participants marched through the streets of Cape Town, demanding an end to violence against women.

An evening 'Funders Forum' also drew a large crowd, pointing to the popularity of discussions between donors and partner organisations that took place at various points during the Forum. The conference also saw a significant increase in participation from

younger feminist activists – for the first time at an AWID forum, at least 20% of participants were under the age of 30.

Members of the young feminist caucus gave out scarves meant to signal participants' commitments to intergenerational dialogue and, by the conference's end, nearly 700 fuchsia scarves were worn by conference members old and young alike, which added to the already exuberant feel of the Forum.

Bolstered by this momentum, AWID's Srilatha Batliwala closed the Forum on an optimistic note, tracing the many 'big ideas' that had emerged and calling hopefully for the 'next feminist uprising'.

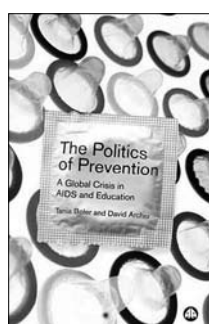
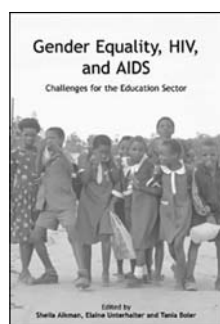
Summaries, recordings, and video of the Forum are available here:
<http://awid.org/eng/Forum-08>

Gwendolyn Beetham is a PhD student at the Gender Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science.

Recent Events

Book Launch on World Aids Day

Theresa Haarhoff-Petersen



1 December 2008 was an appropriate day to launch the publication of two exciting new books: *Gender Equality, HIV and AIDS – A Challenge for the Education Sector*, edited by Sheila Aikman, Elaine Unterhalter and Tania Boler and *Politics of Prevention – A Global Crisis in Aids and Education* by Tania Boler and David Archer. The launch was held at the Institute of Education (IoE).

Guest speakers Professor Peter Aggleton (Thomas Corum Research Unit, IoE) and

Ines Smyth (Global Gender Advisor, Oxfam GB) provided their insights to the value of the two new publications, and their view on the role of Education in addressing issues raised by HIV and AIDS.

They also emphasised the importance of ensuring that gender equality and quality education are achieved for efforts to reduce the impact of HIV and AIDS.

Politics of Prevention relates ActionAid's experiences in an attempt to show that the vast amount of money being spent on treatment means that HIV prevention is being overlooked, and in the process many young people around the world are 'being denied their right to life-saving education'.

Gender Equality, HIV and AIDS comprises research and case studies from academics, NGOs and donor organisations in Africa and South-East Asia.

It focuses on the various challenges presented by working towards gender equality in an education system which is affected by HIV and AIDS in a multiplicity of ways. 'Gender inequalities in society are driving aspects of the HIV epidemic, and this is particularly the case in the education sector'. It is contended that raising awareness of HIV and AIDS in education can lead to empowerment and positive change.

To read more about these publications, visit the Action Aid and Oxfam websites. The following links may be useful.

<http://www.actionaid.org/main.aspx?PageID=1128>

<http://publications.oxfam.org.uk/>

Theresa Haarhoff-Petersen is a Masters student in Education, Gender and International Development at the Institute of Education

Book Reviews

Feminisms in Development: contradictions, contestations and challenges

Edited by Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison and Ann Whitehead

Zed Books, 2006, ISBN: 9781842778197

Review by Chandan Shah

As the title indicates, the main focus of this book is on exploring different feminisms in development, and looking at their interpretation in policy and practice.

The book begins by looking at the struggles related to power and the inclusion of feminist thinking and feminist groups within development discourse; the shift from a focus on 'women' to a focus on 'gender'; and the attitudes and constraints relating to the way 'gender' is viewed within mainstream development. The second section concentrates on development and how the concept of 'gender' is evolving within it. The shift from 'women' to 'gender' and development has led to increased exposure for both women and men marginalised by development processes; however this focus ignores some serious issues specific to women. This is emphasised here by the writers who identify the implications of moving away from this focus, and mention the need to implement policies

that are culturally sensitive in order for long term progress and change to occur. The final section of the book discusses the ground covered in the past (for instance women's formal rights, empowerment, and international forums) and the necessity of adapting these ideas and feminist concepts to current situations for increased recognition of women's needs and interests. This is in relation to new themes like 'inclusion' and 'rights' that are being addressed within wider social and political contexts.

There is a common demand noted in the articles that women themselves, especially at the local level, should come forward and be given voice to provide ideas for development projects that will have an impact on their lives. These ideas can then be supported and reinforced by other local groups and international actors in a way that is culturally sensitive and specifically directed to particular groups (for example

female farmers in an Indian village, working women in a Ghanaian city). Involving women at all levels of the policy-making process, especially at the level of decision making, will mean changes are more likely to be readily accepted and implemented at the local level.

This book encompasses themes around feminism, development and gender equality but is easily accessible to anyone interested in equality and justice and wanting long term change. Specific areas within development, such as education, health, and employment are not considered in depth here, however the nature of the work and concepts reviewed provide a basis to build upon for those interested in these specific topics. A good source of information from a range of perspectives and life experiences should captivate any reader (regardless of interest, position or profession) and invoke awareness, understanding and energy towards global social equality.

Iraqi Women: untold stories from 1948 to the present

Nadje Sadig Al-Ali

Zed Books, 2007, ISBN: 978 1 84277 745 9

Review by Leyli Behbahani

Since the beginning of the so-called war on terror, we have witnessed a flourishing of literature on Islam and the 'plight' of Muslim women from a Western perspective. More often than not, rather than picturing the complexity of issues, these analyses reaffirm the existing stereotypes present in dominant Western political debates and mass media. Nadje Al-Ali's account of Iraqi women is an exception both in its method and analysis. In the context of growing international attention to Islamism in general and to Iraq in particular, Al-Ali's book assumes the value of a calm yet passionate political statement. She explores the history of Iraq, from 1948 to 2006, through the memories and experiences of a vast number of Iraqi women, residing both in Iraq and the Diaspora and of various backgrounds. It is a sensitive, unique, and balanced historical narrative.

The premise of the book is that histories and memories are constructed. They are as much inspired by the present conditions as they are

rooted in past experiences. Our evaluation of the past is not static but changes as we project different present experiences onto it. Highly aware of this, and cautious to prevent overlaps, Al-Ali brings together both personal and official accounts on Iraq, as well as her own anecdotes, to point to the many different sides of 'truth' without overlooking what constitutes the 'real' in terms of political development, repression, wars, and social changes. By describing her own standpoint – as someone of Iraqi origin who grew up outside of Iraq – and that of her interviewees, Al-Ali aligns the personal and political in order to show that there is more than one way to be influenced by sociopolitical events.

This extremely nuanced picture of Iraq reveals the devastating effects of decades of sanctions, militarism, and growing sectarianism on the lives of women. Furthermore, Al-Ali argues that the religious and ethnic divisions that we witness today are the result of this tumultuous atmosphere

linked to the occupation. Until very recently, the differences in women's experiences could be identified in terms of social class, political orientation, place of residence, and their being rural or urban.

In chapter one, Al-Ali begins by mapping out her various research sites. The next five chapters cover the key events related to the Revolution in 1958, the first Ba'ath nationalist coup in 1963, the presidency of Saddam-Hussein, the years of sanctions, and the present situation under American occupation.

This book is more than just a female-centred modern history of Iraq; it is an interrogation of identity and memory. It was a work of self-discovery for the author and will be such for its reader. The use of fluid and immediate prose as well as simple concepts make this book quite accessible for any reader – particularly those with an interest in the gendered aspect of social processes and development.

Weblinks

Association for Women's Rights in Development

AWID

The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is an international, multi-generational, feminist, creative, future-orientated membership organisation committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights.

<http://www.awid.org>

The African Women's Development and Communication Network

FEMNET

FEMNET is an umbrella network for women's rights organisations in Africa. Based in Nairobi, Kenya, FEMNET aims to provide a channel through which these NGOs can reach one another and share experiences, information and strategies so as to improve their work on African women's development, equality and human rights.

<http://www.femnet.or.ke>

The Network of East-West Women

NEWW – Polska

NEWW is an international communication and resource network for those concerned about the status of women in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. NEWW coordinates research and advocacy that supports women's equality and full participation in all aspects of public and private life.

<http://www.neww.org>

WOMANKIND

WOMANKIND works with women's organisations around the world to reduce violence against women, and to support women to play an active role in society and to fight for their rights.

<http://www.womankind.org.uk>

Equality for women: a handbook for NHIRIs on economic, social and cultural rights

Equitas – International Centre for Human Rights Education

This handbook is intended as a tool for staff and members of national human rights institutions (NHIRIs) to enhance their work in protecting and promoting women's equality through economic, social and cultural rights.

Available at: <http://www.equitas.org/english/pdf/EquitasWESCRHandbook.pdf>

A world for inclusion: ensuring education for all through the UN Disability Convention (DVD)

UNESCO

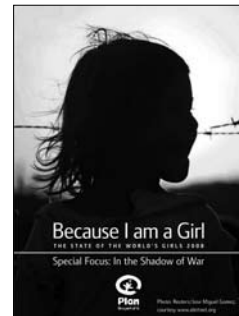
Using footage from schools in Kenya, Finland and Turkey and interviews with experts and stakeholders, this 20-minute DVD aims to raise awareness of the new UN Disability Convention and encourage its implementation.

Available at: http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=57474&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

New Reports

State of the World's Girls 2008 – Because I am a Girl: In the Shadow of War

Plan UK



Plan UK's report 'In the Shadow of War' reveals why and how girls' rights are being violated in countries affected by armed conflict. It shows clearly what is lost when girls' voices are ignored and their capacities and skills go unrecognised and under-developed.

The report highlights that the impact of conflict on girls goes beyond their experiences as either combatants or victims of violence to encompass their health, education, gender roles and relationships. It analyses girl's experience during conflict through the lenses of Participation and Empowerment, Gender Roles and Relations, Access to Basic Services, Security and Protection and Economic Security.

The report argues that a lack of effective interventions means that many nations, and the girls who live in them, will remain in a cycle of insecurity for decades, which will hinder progress towards lasting peace. The report features original research, case-studies and girls' voices from the frontline.

The report is available to download at:
<http://www.plan-uk.org/becauseiamagirl/>

Keshet Bechan, Plan UK

Letters

I read with keen interest this newsletter. As an avid mentor and coach, I especially liked the article in issue 22 entitled: Building Staff Confidence – the Mentoring Method. I am the Editor of a newsletter for a Section called the Feminist Legal Analysis of the Ontario Bar Association. One of the things I do is to reprint articles, which are "thinking-out-of-the-box" in content: I would like to reprint the said article in my next newsletter.

Sincerely,
Patricia E. DeGuire, Canada

WRITE NOW!

Do you have a particular view that you want to raise in Equals or a comment to make about the newsletter in general?

Contact the Editors: a.north@ioe.ac.uk
or by post: Amy North,
EFPS, Institute of Education,
University of London, 20 Bedford Way,
London WC1H 0AL

Forthcoming events

| | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 – 13 March | 53rd Session of the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) New York, USA |
| 8 March | International Women's Day |
| 25 – 27 March | Gender and Education Association 7th International Conference: Gender: Regulation and Resistance in Education Institution of Education, University of London www.ioe.ac.uk/fps/genderconference09 |
| 30 – 4 April | Global symposium on Engaging men and boys in gender equality Rio de Janeiro, Brazil www.engagingmen2009.org |
| 31 – 2 April | Conference: Education for sustainable development – moving into the second half of the UN decade Bonn, Germany www.esd-world-conference-2009.org |
| 20 – 26 April | The Global Campaign for Education Global Action Week: The Big Read www.campaignforeducation.org |
| 19 – 22 May | Conference: Living and learning for a viable future – the power of adult education (CONFINTEA VI) Belem, Brazil http://www.confintea.hu/eng/confintea/ |
| 6 – 9 July | Conference: Responses to end sexual violence Johannesburg, South Africa www.svri.org |

The KIC Project

KIC is an Oxfam International project which is based on the existing needs of counterparts to improve learning from one another. It seeks to promote the systematic exchange of knowledge and learning from relevant experiences and networking around 5 key themes, including education.

KIC offers the infrastructure to do this: a virtual KIC Portal, where counterparts and others can meet each other, locate other partners working in the same field, browse through thematic web sites, document their practices and research, find knowledge sources and participate in “virtual discussion rooms”, known as “Communities of Practice”.

This issue of Equals has been supported by the KIC project, which is collaborating with Beyond Access to reinforce learning on gender and education. It is hoped that this collaboration will encourage counterparts and Equals readers to use Equals to actively share their own knowledge around gender equality in education, by publishing practices, taking up guest editorship roles, reacting to Equals articles and participating in on-line discussions in Communities of Practice or forums on the KIC website.

For more information on the KIC project go to www.oxfamkic.org

Contact Details

Managing Editors: Elaine Unterhalter
Sheila Aikman

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

Please contact us with any comments or enquiries:

Amy North,
Beyond Access,
School of Educational Foundations
and Policy Studies,
Institute of Education,
20 Bedford Way,
London WC1 OAL

Tel: 0044 20 7911 5405

Fax: 0044 20 7612 6366

Email: a.north@ioe.ac.uk

Website: www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/beyondaccess
or www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/issues/education/gender_equality.html

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

