Reflections from the Chair

Chemba Raghavan, Chair, East Asia and Pacific Regional UNGEI

The East Asia and Pacific (EAP) region encompasses one third of the world’s population - around 2 billion people - with diverse political and economic systems, ethnicities and cultures. It is a region with a rapid decline in poverty accompanied by an increase in inequalities in income. Despite the significant progress in achieving basic education and gender equality in the region, issues of inequity persist. Those children still not realizing their right to education are most likely to be from poor, remote, and rural areas from ethnic or linguistic minority groups, or excluded because they are living with disabilities, affected by HIV & AIDS, or victims of child labour or sexual exploitation. The experience of discrimination for girls and women is likely to be even more severe at multiple levels. Given such a situation in the region, it is critical to address the issue of marginalization to improve the quality and availability of girls’ education. This Newsletter highlights the stories of girls and women who have demonstrated empowerment and leadership for themselves as well as their communities. I hope this Newsletter will serve as a platform to share and strengthen experiences and knowledge among the EAP UNGEI members.
Still young, but competent

Prasith CHIN, Aide et Action

15 year old KHAY Srey Leak studies in grade 9 in the lower secondary school in Sambo commune, Kratie province, Cambodia. Being a very good student, Srey Leak was asked to become a ‘small teacher’ volunteer at the local youth club in 2013. Her father, a carpenter and her mother, a housewife, are very proud of her.

All small teachers are part of the “targeted educational strategies for pro-poor community development” project, implemented by the NGO Sipar in partnership with Aide et Action, and supported by the European Union. These young volunteers are professionally trained for three weeks to teach other children from grade one to grade six in their villages, especially those with learning difficulties. Each group teaches different subjects including English, mathematics, hygiene and Khmer literature.

Children with learning difficulties are identified by the local schools. Their parents are then informed about the opportunity for their children to join extra tutoring classes to help prevent them dropping out of school. To ensure high standards of teaching amongst the volunteers, the school director and project team regularly monitor the small teachers. To further improve methods and class management of the small teachers, the project team plans to send the volunteers for additional trainings in the near future. Currently, every commune targeted by the project is provided with a number of small teachers according to their needs.

“Being a volunteer in the youth club allows me to develop myself. I am now more brave and confident”

Srey Leak teaches English for one hour a day, Monday to Saturday. Currently, she has approximately 15 students. Her classes are particularly useful for the children from families in poverty to improve their English for school since extra language classes are rare and expensive. In addition, Srey Leak can practice her own English language skills and gain teaching experience. “Being a volunteer in the youth club allows me to develop myself. I am now more brave and confident,” she says. Srey Leak is very happy with her teaching as most children participate actively and constantly improve their English. After each lesson of teaching new vocabularies and grammar, she organizes a role play for the students to give them an opportunity to practice speaking.
Community based planning results in empowerment and leadership for girls and women in Papua New Guinea.

Andrea De Silva, IOM Papua New Guinea

Addressing disaster risk reduction for a whole community, rather than targeting gender inequality in isolation can have unintentional, but delightful impacts, such as providing opportunities for leadership and empowerment for girls and women. This was recently seen through IOM’s disaster risk management programme for marginalized communities in Papua New Guinea. The DRR programme gave women and girls a space to participate and actively shape decisions for their communities, often for the first time.

Women and Girls in marginalized communities in Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea is known for its rugged terrain and inaccessibility. Most people live in isolated and remote communities which are tied together by tribal and clan affiliations with a mix of traditional and modern lifestyles. These communities predominantly live on subsistence agriculture and fishing, often with poor access to steady income, sanitation and health facilities.¹ Some communities are also prone to disasters such as landslides, earthquakes, flooding, tribal conflicts and the effects of climate change, which destroy the little resources they have.

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In an attempt to support such communities, IOM has recently launched a USAID-funded disaster management programme in Morobe and Oro provinces, targeting 12 disaster affected communities.

The initial assessments\(^2\) and observations of IOM field staff\(^3\) in these provinces found that women and girls often have less access to education and are consequently left out of the decision-making process. Education disparities between women over and under the age of 25 were particularly noted. Older women were often educated up to the grade level 10 due to the presence of missionary schools during their formative years, whereas women under the age of 25 are less likely to be educated beyond grade level eight (8). Barriers to education for these girls include: inability to pay school fees, failing to achieve the minimum grade for advancement, teenage pregnancies and poor facilities to deal with the menstrual cycles.

Comparing boys and girls of the similar age, it was found that most boys are educated up to the grade level ten (10), with some of them having completed tertiary education. This difference in the level of education between sexes illustrates that the education of boys is more valued than girls. In these circumstances, women and girls often lack the confidence to speak up, feeling unqualified to raise their voices and participate in decision-making processes.

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\(^2\) IOM Community Knowledge Assessment 2013

\(^3\) Interview with IOM field staff 8th May 2014
Harange were eventually convinced by the women’s groups to support building a health clinic. One man recalled how he had to carry women with childbirth complications for 15 kilometres to get to the nearest hospital, often only to see the woman die. This was a cost that the community was no longer willing to bear.

During the planning session, women were more willing to speak their minds and actively participate despite lower levels of education, because according to IOM field officer Miranda Amen, “women and men were learning something together - men had no right to say, they don’t know what they’re talking about.”

However, it should be noted that it was necessary to go through a process of persuading and influencing the men, as they still perceived themselves as the primary decision-makers. Furthermore, while women openly spoke up and participated in their own group, only the more educated women felt more confident and at ease to present ideas in front of the full community.

This brought up an important issue of the lack of confidence in girls as they were even more reluctant to contribute than women, which IOM field staff believe is a direct result of the lower education level of girls in comparison to women. However, girls were observed to be openly discussing issues with boys of their own age, implying that the hesitancy may come from the difference in age and education level, rather than the sex difference.

So far, the programme has been successful with women comprising 43% of participants in the Training of Trainers workshops, enabling participants to continue with community based planning.

Women have also taken a key leadership role in reforestation and forest conservation in Oro province. In fact, the Buna community in Oro have put forward a project that focuses on strengthening women’s leadership and addressing the widespread issue of gender based violence. The community based planning process adopted by this programme has opened up a non-threatening space for women and girls in remote communities in Papua New Guinea to speak-up and participate in decision-making processes, despite their low levels of education. It also presented an opportunity to get an insight into the challenges that women face in day-to-day life.

Nonetheless, it appears that the confidence to speak up and participate in this process depends much on the education level of each individual. Girls are rarely educated beyond grade (eight) making them one of the least educated groups in the community. This is largely due to the inaccessibility of schools, unaffordable school fees and a high rate of teenage pregnancies. This is furthermore coupled with the fact that boys’ education has been prioritized over girls has led to girls lacking the confidence to participate and contribute to the decision-making process.

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4 Interview with IOM field staff 8th May 2014
5 IOM mid-term evaluation 2013
However, the community based planning approach did succeed in breaking down some of barriers between men and women, despite their differences in education, and if continued, could pave the way for stronger leadership and empowerment among girls in the near future.

**What is ‘inclusion’?**

| Exclusion | Segregation | Integration | Inclusion |

Nicole Anne Marie Magpayo is one of the most expressive youth leaders. But much more than any other young individual, it took tons of self-reflection, strength of purpose and the support of many people, before she could overcome unique challenges in childhood and get to this point. Besides being a girl, Nicole is also a Youth with Disability. She was born deaf.

In the Philippines, as in other countries in East Asia and the Pacific, disability in a child or a youth in many instances is a ‘sentence of invisibility’. Parents and families are ashamed and embarrassed of their children’s conditions and try to hide them at home. These parents may also feel they are only being protective of their child with disability, who is an easy target for bullying and sexual abuse, especially for the girl-child, because of a perception that they would not be credible givers of testimony.
Because of these and other unsupportive school factors, the much needed paradigm shift – that persons with disabilities are not “objects” of charity, medical treatment and social protection but “subjects” with rights who are capable of claiming their rights and making decisions based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society – is difficult to realize.

But this is exactly why we need more young people like Nicole, youth with disabilities learning to be fully engaged and on their way to become leaders in their own rights. Today, Nicole is president of the Benildean Deaf Association of students while pursuing a Bachelor course in Applied Deaf Studies. Her organization provides support to deaf students to develop their leadership potentials, be aware of their rights and become more confident in the mainstream context.

However, Nicole in her primary school days was a far cry from the articulate young lady she is today. In her childhood Nicole was painfully shy, made almost no friends in school, was easily hurt and felt terribly humiliated when she made mistakes in her lessons. She was all this, despite having a caring family and a supportive mother who always urged her to ‘just focus’ and who kept telling her ‘don’t be shy’. Looking back and trying to find out why, she thinks it may have to do with the physical abuse she experienced in the hands of her ‘yaya’ (caregiver).

In a recent policy brief on gender and inequalities, Christian Blind Mission (CBM), an international organization promoting disability-inclusive development in poorer communities in the world, noted that “while women and girls with disabilities face similar experiences to non-disabled women with respect to gender-based violence, they also face unique issues as a result of their disability. For example women and girls with disabilities can be at risk of violence and abuse by a caregiver, who is also responsible for providing them with assistance and support with daily living.”

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It was in secondary school while sitting in a ‘hearing’ class that Nicole realized just how badly she wanted to communicate with others but the pedagogy of all those early years in an ‘oral school’ for the deaf did not give her the proper skills to do so. She was also confused.

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6 Interview with Ms. Nicole Mappayo on 21 May 2014, with acknowledgments to sign-language interpreter and voice translator, Mr. John Xandre Baliza, Coordinator of Filipino Sign Language Learning Program, SDEAS.

7 A mainstream class of non-deaf students

8 Deaf students were not taught sign language but to learn to distinguish sounds and speak, and to lip-read
that while her mother reassured her she was doing alright, other people told her they could not understand at all what she was trying to say.

This was when sign language became such an important life skill acquisition. Learning sign language was Nicole’s turning point, as it enabled her to achieve good academic performance and win a college scholarship at the School of Deaf Education and Applied Studies.

“What I want the most is to be a bridge... I have seen hearing people helping out and teaching the deaf. Now is the chance to turn the tables...”

According to Giselle Montero, the Director of the school’s Center for Partnerships and Development, issues around the use of sign language in public and private deaf schools has certain parallelisms to the issues and debates around Mother Tongue-Based, Multi-Lingual Education (MTB/MLE).

Filipino sign language (FSL) is a natural, unique visual language of the Filipino deaf and they are advocating for the Department of Education (DepEd) to recognize this as the medium of instruction. But there are quarters that say it is better to retain the Signed Exact English (SEE) as the official medium of communication in schools, as was declared in 2011 by DepEd, in much the same way that English spoken language is being pushed in the context of a globalized world and a fast-approaching regional (ASEAN) economic integration by 2015.

However this is resolved, for Nicole at least, the expanded communication with both deaf and hearing communities using FSL has developed her leadership potentials. She says, “What I want the most is to be a bridge so that both communities can appreciate each other’s cultures, and they can get involved in joint projects. For the longest time, I have seen hearing people helping out and teaching the deaf. Now is the chance to turn the tables and also see deaf people working to make hearing people learn.”

Nicole acknowledges that she has been somewhat luckier than most other young people with disabilities. Many other children and youth do not have supportive families nor the opportunities for education she had. They remain ‘hidden’ from national censuses, and the lack of hard data on their numbers and profile has ensured their marginalization in terms of national policy and mainstream programmes in the past years.

The 2011 World Report on Disability (WHO, WB) says that 16% of the population in South East Asian countries have some form of mild to severe disability. Based on this, the estimate for Philippine children and youth with disabilities aged 5-14 years in the last census


year 2010 should be around 3.03 million. A more conservative estimate would be based on the observation that in every barangay (village), an average of 40 to 50 school-age children with disabilities are not attending school. This equates to roughly two million children nationwide. And yet, the same census counted them only at 386,406 among a much wider age group of 5-24 years old, giving a sense of how many go unreported and hidden from the public attention. No wonder then that with 24 million students from kindergarten to secondary school, the enrolment in public special education schools stood at about only 250,000 in 2011.

Education in the Philippines is currently undergoing profound changes, with new laws incorporating kindergarten into formal basic education, and adding two more years to the basic education cycle (K to 12). This has presented an increased risk for marginalization of groups already disadvantaged, but at the same time opportunities for their needs to be given attention to, as the whole system has to undergo massive changes in curriculum, pedagogy, learning materials, organization and governance. The key is recognizing that it is indeed an opportune time to advocate and work to infuse the policy changes with the principles of inclusive education. In 2011, different organizations of persons with disabilities (PWDs) approached the Department of Education (DepEd) and inquired about the implications of the K to 12 reform on the schooling of children with disabilities.

In response, DepEd Secretary Armin Luistro established an Advisory Council on the Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (ACECYD) to help draft a Five-Year Development Plan and inform DepED of the education needs – both formal schooling and alternative learning systems – of children with disabilities (CWD). The 18 core members of the ACECYD include organizations of persons with disabilities, counselling associations, research institutions, NGOs focusing on programmes for CWDs and PWDs, and university-based special education programmes. To roll out the strategic planning process, the Advisory Council partnered with the Asian Institute of Management, through the Center for Development Management, to conduct research and to use the research results to help with the plan, which is being finalized following a stakeholders’ consultation in December 2013.

This year, the Education For All (EFA) Global Action Week theme is “Equal Right, Equal Opportunity: Education and Disability” and it was celebrated just this May 4-10. In this spirit,

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10 Based on population of 20,171,800 for age group 5-14 years, Philippine National Statistics Office Census 2010
11 http://www.philstar.com/starweek-magazine/2013/01/27/901413/excluded-enrolled

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policy planners would do well listening to the insights of the young leaders with disability, like Nicole. For example, Nicole said it would have been a more positive learning experience for her if she had enrolled in a mainstream (inclusive) ‘hearing’ school where she could be one among all kinds of children and not feel different, than in a special school just for those with disabilities.

It would have been a more positive learning experience for her if she had enrolled in a mainstream (inclusive) “hearing” school where she could be one among all kinds of children.

When asked what she thought would be the one single most effective thing that would bring more children and youth with disabilities to school and to alternative learning, her response was, “We all come from different circumstances and life situations. But whatever our challenges, we and our families are always encouraged by the stories of role models with disabilities who we can look up to.” Nicole was referring to someone else she admired greatly. But in fact, she is on her way to becoming one herself.

How a library changed my professional life

Prasith CHIN, Aide et Action

EAM Phana, a librarian at the Svay Rolum lower secondary school in Cambodia, enjoys helping children gain knowledge ©Aide et Action

In a room, some children sit in a group, some sit individually and others stand near shelves full of books, but all of them hold books in their hands and read. In the right corner of the room, a woman is cataloguing books that some children have returned to her. She reads the card catalogue attentively before checking out books to children. One can see that she manages the library well and that all children respect the order in the library.

The librarian is Eam Phana, and she works at the Svay Rolum lower secondary school located in Kandal province, around 15 km away from Phnom Penh. She enjoys her job and is satisfied how the library is developing. However, only two years ago, almost no students visited the library. Some years ago, Phana was recruited as a teacher at the Svay Rolum School, and then was nominated as a librarian of the school.
More and more children are interested in reading ©Aide et Action

Like many other school libraries in Cambodia, there were barely any interesting books in her library back then. Also, due to the lack of knowledge in this field, Phana was not able to decorate the library or organize activities to attract the children to come to the library. Most of the time, the library was empty. Hence, she became unsatisfied with her job. She often asked the school director to close the library, but in vain, as it is required in the national policy of the Ministry of Education.

Phana’s thinking changed completely since the beginning of 2011 when Aide et Action Cambodia started collaborating with the school in order to promote reading activities for children.

Since then, a large variety of books, including story books, novels, history, science and life skill books were transferred to the school, and the room was renovated and decorated to attract the students. In addition, Phana was sent to attend training on how to manage the library’s activities, to encode books, to manage the stock and to facilitate the borrowing and returning process.

“I am very happy to see how many students are reading books to improve their knowledge.”

Thanks to this, the library activities have gradually improved and more and more children have become interested in reading.

“I am very happy to see how many students are reading books to improve their knowledge. I am satisfied with my professional life now as I can contribute to reduce the illiteracy in Cambodia and show students how easy it is to find interesting books for them and their family,” Phana said.
What’s Up in EAP UNGEI?

UNGEI advances knowledge and mobilises action on school-related gender-based violence in the Asia-Pacific region

Justine Sass, UNESCO Bangkok

For some children, particularly girls, the mere walk to school is menacing and comes with the daily threat of violence. Once at school, they might also be subject to physical, psychosocial and sexual abuse – bullied by teachers and peers or abused in the name of discipline.

One of the four pillars of the new UNGEI policy advocacy agenda is the reduction/elimination of school-related gender based violence (SRGBV).

SRGBV refers to violence affecting school children that occurs in or around education settings and is perpetrated based on gender roles or norms, and expectations of children based on their sex or gender identities.

While significant work has been done in sub-Saharan Africa to understand the manifestations, scope and impact of SRGBV, there has been less work done in the Asia-Pacific region.

Until now.

In the last six months, EAP-UNGEI has significantly advanced the evidence base and the policy agenda, and put SRGBV on the radar in the region.

This included co-hosting with UNESCO Bangkok and Plan International a regional roundtable meeting, 11-13 November 2013, in Bangkok, Thailand.

The regional roundtable meeting on SRGBV co-hosted by EAP UNGEI, UNESCO Bangkok, and Plan International brought over 45 experts to address SRGBV from over 15 countries in the region.
The meeting brought together over 45 experts involved in research and programmes to address SRGBV from over 15 countries in the region. Emerging from this dialogue and sharing of evidence and experience has emerged commitment to action, both from participants and a wider working group established within EAP UNGEI on SRGBV. Since the regional roundtable meeting, UNESCO Bangkok commissioned and implemented in partnership with the East Asia Pacific Regional UN Girls’ Education Initiative a regional review on SRGBV and related policy and programming in Asia-Pacific.

The review, *School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) in the Asia-Pacific Region*, examines the evidence on SRGBV and related policy and programming in Asia-Pacific, offering a base for much-needed debate and policy-level discussions. The review and its recommendations break ground in defining SRGBV in the Asia-Pacific context and outlining a path towards putting an end to it.

Other steps that have been taken since the meeting by UNGEI partners in this area include:

- Raising awareness about child protection and human rights on an [online radio blog in Pakistan](#);

- An article published in China Women’s News, which is the first of its kind in Chinese media to raise awareness about the concept of SRGBV;

- The organization of a workshop organized by Yayasan Hotline in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture in Indonesia to initiate the development of curriculum for five pre-service teacher training institutions on SRGBV in Java;

- Release of [national review](#) of bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in Thailand (and accompanying [issues brief](#) and [infographic](#), as well as a school-based “Rainbow schools” campaign around the 2014 International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia;

- Preparations are underway for a Gender Forum to be hosted in August by EAP UNGEI, linked to UNGEI GAC meeting. The meeting will explore further the issue of SRGBV and UNGEI support in this area.
New EAP UNGEI Working Groups

Jessica Aumann, UNICEF/UNGEI

EAP UNGEI has recently initiated two new working groups to take forward key areas of the global UNGEI Policy Advocacy Agenda - School Related Gender Based Violence and Marginalisation.

Marginalisation

The East Asia Pacific region possesses a stunning variety in geography, culture and political and economic systems and significant diversity can be seen within countries in terms of wealth, ethnicity and language. The number of out of school children in the region has reduced by half from 10,212,000 in 1999 to 5,118,000 in 2011 (UNESCO, 2013). This is significant progress, however, issues of inequity persist.

The Marginalisation working group aims to address the education and gender issues affecting the most marginalised groups of children. Initially, focus will be on children with disabilities, linguistic minorities, stateless and migrant children and children in emergencies and conflict.

School Related Gender Based Violence

School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) refers to violence affecting school children that occurs in or around education settings and is perpetrated based on a child’s sex or gender. SRGBV is a serious barrier in realising children’s right to education, negatively affecting health and well-being and enrolment and achievement in education (Pawlak, 2014). Evidence indicates boys and girls are at risk of different forms of SRGBV. Boys are more likely to experience physical violence and bullying, while girls face psychological and sexual violence, various forms of discrimination and social exclusion (Contreras et. al., 2012).
The scale of SRGBV in this region is hard to estimate due to a lack of comparable data. However, research does suggest that the issue requires increased programmatic response (Pawlak, 2014). What is needed are comprehensive policies on child protection in education and national, evidence-based action plans to support cross-sectoral implementation of these policies.

The SRGBV working group aims to integrate knowledge and understanding of SRGBV into education and education-related policies and programmes in the region through a partnership of expert members and coordinated actions and messaging. Activities will include national level research, documentation of good practice, advocacy and a focus on curriculum.

**How to get involved**

Participation in both working groups is open to all EAP UNGEI members on a voluntary basis. Members will be expected to provide inputs such as: attending working group meetings and other events; reviewing research reports; contributing to advocacy strategies and products, and curricula and training materials; engaging with policymakers.

If you would like to join a working group please email Jessica Aumann at jaumann@unicef.org

**References**


Announcements

EAP UNGEI supports Gender, Inclusion, and Disability Technical Working Group (GID TWG) in Lao PDR. In the past few years, EAP UNGEI has actively advocated for the establishment of such technical working groups within education sectors. In Lao, UNGEI, along with key development partners, was instrumental in organizing a capacity building workshop on gender in education, and presented this message as a key recommendation. On March 24th, EAP UNGEI Chair Chemba Raghavan, Co-Chair Min Bista, and Communications Officer Eunwoo Kim participated in the GID TWG meeting in Lao PDR. A Ministerial Decree was presented and signed by the Vice Minister Lytou on March 21, 2014. The GID TWG is the first group of its kind in the region, and as such can lead the way in good practices in integrating gender into Education sector planning. EAP UNGEI will continue its support to the GID TWG throughout 2014.

EAP UNGEI members support UNICEF PNG in addressing SRGBV EAP UNGEI Chair Chemba Raghavan and Working Group Coordinator Jessica Aumann visited UNICEF colleagues in Papua New Guinea in April to introduce key issues around SRGBV. The high levels of sexual violence in the country have been found to be a key factor affecting enrolment in education because girls are at risk of such violence while travelling to and at school (World Bank, 2012). There is also some evidence that young girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence within the home, perpetrated by male caregivers who take advantage of a reliance on basic necessities including school fees (Ibid). This year, the UNICEF PNG Education team plans to initiate a mapping of SRGBV in selected provinces.

Two major publications released! EAP UNGEI is proud to support publication of a review of “School-Related Gender-Based Violence in the Asia-Pacific Region” commissioned by UNESCO Bangkok and to release the draft paper “Gender Disabilities and School Education,” which highlights gaps in knowledge around the gender dimensions of education for children with disabilities in the East Asia Pacific region.

UNGEI Gender Forum August 28-29, 2014. EAP UNGEI will bring together regional and global UNGEI members, policy makers, CSOs, donors and experts for a Regional Forum on Gender Equality in Education. The aim of the Forum is to strengthen understandings of implementing gender equality in education policies and programmes. Invitations will be disseminated in the coming weeks. Please contact Jessica Aumann jaumann@unicef.org