

Barriers to Girls' Education, Strategies and Interventions



Lina (centre), 18, helps three neighbourhood children create drawings, seated on the floor in her home in the Khaikhana neighbourhood of Kabul, the capital. Lina completed the third grade before she was forced to stop school. Determined to continue her education, she asked her brother, a university student, to help her study.

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Household/Community-Level Barriers

Areas for analysis	Possible findings/causes	Broad Strategies	Possible interventions
Direct costs of schooling, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - school fees - clothing and shoes - school books/supplies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families cannot meet direct costs, so children do not enrol in school or they drop out. <p>Gender dimension: If a choice has to be made between sending a boy or a girl to school, the boy will usually be given precedence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy for affordable education (including elimination of school fees) • Awareness-raising in importance of girls' education (so parents will strive to send all, rather than some, of their children to school) • Poverty reduction strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentive programmes, such as small scholarships, subsidies, food, school supplies and uniforms • Micro enterprise programmes • School feeding programmes through strengthened partnerships • Provision of supplies
Indirect costs of schooling, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "opportunity costs" - child labour and work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families cannot afford the loss of income or labour contribution of their children, so their children do not enrol or attend. <p>Gender dimension: Traditional division of labour often disadvantages girls (more likely to have to work in the home, care for siblings etc.).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness-raising that child labour is bad economics/ development • Social mobilization/sensitization on the importance of girls' education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible school timetables • Child-care programmes for siblings, children • Reallocation of household tasks • Mother/parent/caregiver education • School feeding programmes

Areas for analysis	Possible findings/causes	Broad Strategies	Possible interventions
<p>Attitudes and practices, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - traditional, cultural or religious beliefs - gender stereotypes - lack of knowledge on benefits of education - gender-differentiated child-rearing practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education not valued or is seen as irrelevant to or in conflict with accepted roles in society. • Limited involvement of parents in schooling and early learning. <p>Gender dimension: Early marriage, low status of women, and intractable patriarchal societies often result in lower priority on education of girls. Content of education reinforces gender stereotypes. “Hidden curriculum” of discrimination is perpetuated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitization to importance of girls’ education and completion of schooling • Advocacy and actions to make schools safer and more secure • Strengthened links between schools and communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media programmes and motivational material (posters, story books, Meena, Sara, etc.) • National Enrolment Days • Culturally appropriate schools • Endorsement of education (particularly girls’ education) by religious and other leaders • Gender-awareness training • Micro planning • Better parenting programmes • Village committees, parent-teacher associations, etc., to promote community and parental involvement in girls’ education • Inclusion programmes (disability, ethnicity, poverty, etc.)
<p>Health-related issues, including poor nutrition and HIV/AIDS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children not able to participate and/or learn. • Children caring for sick family members. Child-headed households. <p>Gender dimension: Girls often more likely to care for family and work. Girls more vulnerable to exploitation without family stability. Boys get often more food than girls.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitization to importance of water and sanitation • Awareness raising for HIV/AIDS and nutrition related issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community networks for children in need • Partnerships that provide care and support to affected children in school, community and family • Water and sanitation programmes

Areas for analysis	Possible findings/causes	Broad Strategies	Possible interventions
Situations of crisis and instability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children separated from families unable to attend. • Children recruited into military or support activities. <p>Gender dimension: Girls more frequently required to head households, boys more frequently recruited into military service.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to community initiatives in schooling • Advocacy and actions to make schools safe and secure havens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Back to school” campaigns to encourage post-conflict normalization • Psychosocial support for children and caregivers (including teachers)



In 1995 in Bangladesh, a young woman sitting on a straw mat with other women reads from an exercise book, while her teacher listens and village children stand nearby, during a UNICEF-assisted adult literacy class in the northern town of Dinajpur.

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School-Level Barriers

Areas for analysis	Possible findings/causes	Broad Strategies	Possible interventions
No school close to home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased likelihood of non-enrolment or non-attendance and dropping out after enrolment. <p>Gender dimension: Issues of safety and security. Parents less likely to allow daughters to attend school if they have to travel long distances. In some countries, boarding facilities are available, but only for boys.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide support and technical assistance to government and communities to ensure increased access for those children who are hardest to reach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School mapping to improve planning and targeting “Child-seeking” Child Friendly Schools Infrastructure programmes Schools closer to home (including through cluster schools, multigrade or non-formal approaches as a bridging measure) Boarding/lodging facilities for girls
<p>Poor quality environment, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - poor condition of building - overcrowding - lack of water or sanitation - violence (physical and psychological) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased likelihood of non-attendance and dropping out. Poor achievement. <p>Gender dimension: Lack of separate sanitation facilities particularly affects adolescent girls. Boys often experience beating and bullying; girls more likely to be called on for service tasks (e.g., cleaning), or be sexually assaulted or harassed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened policies and strategies for Health Promoting Schools Advocacy and action for safety and security in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sanitation facilities - separate latrines for girls Repair and rehabilitation Mentor programmes (older girls to younger girls)

Areas for analysis	Possible findings/causes	Broad Strategies	Possible interventions
<p>Poor quality content, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of/outdated curriculum - inadequate learning materials - biased or inappropriate content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners may not learn what they need to (literacy, numeracy and life skills-based education). • Discrimination and stereotypes reinforced. <p>Gender dimension: Girls/females often invisible in curriculum content and images, and often excluded from taught curriculum. Gender stereotypes are reinforced and eventually gender inequalities perpetuated in a wider societal context.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote skills-based, gender-sensitive educational content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender review of quality in education • Gender-sensitive curriculum reform, including in literacy, numeracy and life skills-based learning areas, including rights, gender equality, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, peace and respect for diversity • Relevant, gender-sensitive materials that do not reinforce stereotypes • Provision of supplies and equitable distribution
<p>Poor quality learning processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - untrained/poorly trained teachers - lack of assessment - outdated teaching technologies - poor school management - inflexible school calendar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners not developing to their full potential. • Possible non attendance, dropping out, limited transition from primary to secondary education or from school to work. <p>Gender dimension: Girls often pushed into nonprofessional courses, and often overlooked by teachers in classroom discussions. Lack of female role models. Nonflexible calendar may lead to higher female drop-out rates because of competing demands (e.g., work, care for siblings).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote gender-sensitive teaching and learning processes. • Build capacity of teachers and school-management • Promote active participation of children and young people in programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training of teachers, especially women • Gender awareness training for teachers, officials, communities, leaders • Training in administration and management • Introduction of new technologies for learning and administration • Provision of quality-relevant supplies • Flexible approaches to the school calendar • Incentives, particularly for female teachers in rural areas • Active involvement of communities and parents in schools

Areas for analysis	Possible findings/causes	Broad Strategies	Possible interventions
Health-related issues and HIV/AIDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners unable/unready to participate and learn. • Absenteeism/dropping out/death of pupils and teachers, particularly because of HIV/AIDS. • Schools unable to accommodate special needs of physically or learning disabled. <p>Gender dimension: Girls more likely to care for family. Girls disproportionately affected by lack of skills-based health education. Higher vulnerability to HIV infection among school-age girls than boys in many countries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build capacity, strengthen partnerships and support countries in intersectoral education programmes around important local issues such as HIV/AIDS or water and sanitation. • Support to schools and teachers in incorporating HIV/AIDS awareness and life skills-based approaches at the school level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of FRESH • School sanitation and hygiene education programmes • Monitoring of impact of health-related issues on education planning and response
Conflict and instability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools damaged, destroyed or closed. • Teachers dispersed or unable to teach. • Children and teachers emotionally affected by trauma. • Schools unsafe – mines, conflict, recruitment. <p>Gender dimension: Girls denied access to limited opportunities; boys more frequently recruited into military service.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapid assessment of educational needs • Support for community schooling • Provision of basic supplies and shelter materials • “Back-to-school” campaigns for normalization • Psychosocial interventions at school level; training of teachers and school directors

Policy- and System-Level Barriers

Areas for analysis	Possible findings/causes	Broad Strategies	Possible interventions
<p>Inadequate legal framework in such areas as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - compulsory education - child labour - re-entry into school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Education not free and compulsory in principle or practice. ▪ Increased likelihood that children will fall through the safety net, be unable to take examinations or be forbidden re-entry into school. <p>Gender dimension: Girls often miss out on education if choices have to be made. The absence of a birth certificate often precludes eligibility for entry or examinations. Girls are less likely to be registered than boys. Pregnant girls are excluded from school, even following birth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy for implementation of compulsory education laws • Advocacy for implementation of labour laws • Advocacy for laws allowing for continued schooling for pregnant girls, or re-admission to schools after pregnancy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth registration campaigns • Analysis, planning and implementation of policies supporting girls' education
<p>Lack of enforcement of existing laws and policies relating to, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - corporal punishment - child labour - school fees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased likelihood of non-enrolment, non-attendance and dropping out. <p>Gender dimension: "Son preference" in enrolment, traditional gender division of labour and lack of a safe and secure environment can have a disproportionate impact on girls.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy for implementation of existing policies, regulations and laws • Support to child-friendly, gender-sensitive schools • Advocacy to eliminate corporal punishment and violence in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking poverty reduction strategies, such as minimum household income subsidies, to school attendance

Areas for analysis	Possible findings/causes	Broad Strategies	Possible interventions
<p>Insufficient national budgetary allocations to primary and secondary education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Insufficient school places. ▪ Underpaid and unmotivated teachers. ▪ Decline in quality and achievement. <p>Gender dimension: Increased competition for access usually affects girls more; gender imbalances in teaching force.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for reallocation of national budgets in favour of basic education • Support for sector-wide approaches to education development • Mobilization of partners and facilitation of donor coordination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-based review of budget and planning in education • Introduction of the UN Girls' Education Initiative at country level for support and advocacy
<p>Isolation of education from existing national frameworks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education plans not aligned with national development or poverty reduction plans. • Education not treated as investment with impact on poverty reduction. • Education budget share limited. <p>Gender dimension: The role of women in national development, and the economic and social returns on investment in girls' education are important factors to be addressed in national plans.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy for linkage of education plans to PRSP or national development plans • Support to the development of EFA national plans of action with strong gender dimensions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of the UN Girls' Education Initiative at country level for support and advocacy

Areas for analysis	Possible findings/causes	Broad Strategies	Possible interventions
Outdated curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children not equipped with the knowledge, attitudes and skills required for a modern society. <p>Gender dimension: Gender stereotypes reinforced; girls less likely to achieve parity in learning outcomes.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical support for curriculum review and development • Support for pilot/demonstration programmes using modern technologies to expand access and improve quality • Support for revision of learning materials and elimination of gender and other bias
Lack of completion and transition to next stage of education			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation child-friendly, gender sensitive schools which are healthy, effective, gender sensitive, child-seeking and protective
Lack of political will			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of partnerships, particularly the UN Girls' Education Initiative

Areas for analysis	Possible findings/causes	Broad Strategies	Possible interventions
<p>Poor quality processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pre-service and in-service teacher training (including gender insensitive) - learning outcomes not defined in literacy, numeracy and life skills-based education - lack of learning assessment tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of trained personnel, defined learning outcomes and assessment tools. Negative impact on enrolment and performance of learners. <p>Gender dimension: Few female teachers, lack of gender sensitivity or active discrimination in teaching and learning processes, gender inequality in outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for innovative teacher development programmes and continued professional support • Support for the identification and assessment of learning outcomes in numeracy, literacy and life skills-based education • Capacity-building and policies for second-chance education for youth and drop-outs • Advocacy and technical support showing the links between curriculum, teacher training and outcomes for learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender awareness training for officials • Gender-sensitive workshops focusing on eliminating disparity and dealing with discrimination • Promotion of participatory approaches to learning

Areas for analysis	Possible findings/causes	Broad Strategies	Possible interventions
HIV/AIDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devastated infrastructure, services and human capacity of systems. • Contracting education budgets due to strain of AIDS on economies. • Impaired performance and high attrition where large numbers of teachers and other staff have become infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. • Loss of administrators and managers affecting quality of planning, training and support. • All the above reversing recent positive gains in basic education. <p>Gender dimension: Disproportionate caretaking burden on girls; decline in girls' gross enrolment and intake ratios in high-prevalence countries; diminished resources to ensure safety of girls at school; most vulnerable children and girls are first to be affected when education budgets shrink.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for training of officials and key stakeholders in developing system responses to the HIV/AIDS pandemic • Support for the development of education and other policies ensuring that children affected by HIV/AIDS are not excluded from school or learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of, and training in, life skills-based approaches to learning

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Conflict and instability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collapse of system administration, supervision and examinations. • Unpaid teachers, untrained schools personnel. • Conflict over curriculum issues. <p>Gender dimension: Lack of system control to limit discrimination on grounds of gender; women teachers have to work, teach and perform domestic duties.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist all countries to prepare for, and respond to, conflict and other crises so that affected children can fulfil their right to basic education in safe, stable and gender-sensitive environments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interaction with education authorities at appropriate levels to promote early resumption of schooling • Logistical and policy support for distribution of basic supplies • Production and distribution of curriculum and learning materials • Facilitation of agency and NGO coordination • Mobilization of resources through the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) and other mechanisms • Resource mobilization for continued post-conflict/crisis support



Two adolescent girls from a junior secondary school record their discussion on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, in a booth at Radio Botswana, the national radio station, in Gaborone, the capital.

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