



Behind the screen

An inside look at gender
inequality in Asia

Revised edition

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Contributors to the first edition

Hoa Phuong Tran, Plan Asia
Lisa Woods, Consultant
Kamal Herath, Plan Sri Lanka
Kosal Chea, Plan Cambodia
Liu Min, Plan China
Mohammad Mohsin, Plan Bangladesh
Nasim Sherin, Plan Pakistan
Nguyen Minh Nhat, Plan Vietnam
Randeep Kaur, Plan India
Rowena Campo, Plan Philippines
Sadananda Kadel, Plan Nepal
Sudiyo, Plan Indonesia

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Plan Asia Regional Office

18th Floor, Ocean Tower 2 Building,
75/24 Sukhumvit 19 Road,
Klongtoey Nua, Wattana,
Bangkok, 10110, Thailand
Tel +66 2 204 2630-4
Fax +66 2 204 2629
Email: asia.ro@plan-international.org
www.plan-international.org/asia/

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Foreword

Gender inequality has planted its roots deeply and strongly alongside Asian ways of living. It is everywhere, from home to school and community, and rises up to the level of national politics. Together with poverty and other social issues such as child marriage and child labour, the disparity becomes dominant, preventing millions of girls from having the opportunity to study and to lead a good life. Even worse, it risks harming their physical and emotional condition.

Gender discrimination has its most glaring reflection in the education arena, particularly in South Asian countries. Plan has conducted gender scans to assess the level of gender sensitivity in its education programmes in Asia and identify modifications to improve them in the future.

The report you have in your hands clearly portrays the reality and reasons why nearly 16 million girls are not going to school in Asia. This revised edition uses summary tables and case studies to show this clearly, even to readers who only have time to scan the document.

As a woman and a mother, I feel sad to see the unfair treatment girls receive. Within the same level of poverty, girls are kept from school while boys stay on. It is disappointing to know that some parents find they must save money for their daughter's dowry instead of paying for her schooling. It is frustrating to learn that despite the fact that basic education is now compulsory in most of Asia, so many girls still do not go to school.

With 60 years of experience working with children and communities in Asia, Plan is committed to eradicating poverty and making a positive difference in their lives. The issues revealed in this publication are extremely helpful for us in tackling the problems and increasing our effectiveness. I do hope the good practices and approaches shown in this publication will help us learn from each other, bring more girls into school and ultimately achieve gender equality in education.

Myrna Evora

Regional Director
Plan Asia
Bangkok, Thailand



Background

Asia is vast and diverse. The region boasts a plethora of landscapes, cultures, religions and ethnic groups. Unfortunately, Asia can also be characterised by unequal achievement in human development, with great disparities that straddle geographic, socio-economic, ethnic and gender lines.

Human development and the eradication of poverty are the aims of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. Its third goal is to promote gender equality and empower women. Since women and girls account for two-thirds of the people in the world who are illiterate, the third goal includes eliminating gender disparity in education. This goal is closely related to the second goal, which is to achieve universal primary education.¹

The communities where Plan works may not be aware of these goals, and they would certainly not know that only a few Asian-Pacific countries met the initial 2005 deadline. However, the second target date of 2015 for achieving the goals is, for most of Asia, not beyond reach. Some countries are on track, though others lag behind. It could be argued that failure to meet these two goals would imperil Asia's achievement of the six others.

Plan first carried out a critical review, or 'gender scan', in 2003 to assess our education programmes and their level of gender sensitivity. The gender scan was conceived and conducted not as a one-off assessment, but as part of a continuous monitoring process. Later that year we held a regional workshop to discuss the results and translate them into positive steps to support girls' education.²

The second scan, which we carried out in 2006, was aimed at gaining further insights into community views and answering the questions in figure 1.

The ten Plan country offices in Asia with education programmes participated in this scan: Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Vietnam. Plan staff used two key tools: a gender scan matrix (see annex 1 for a copy of the instrument), which enabled each Plan country office to make a self-assessment of their progress; and focus group discussions with children, parents, teachers, principals, Plan partners and community representatives (see annex 2 for questions put to the focus groups).



Each Plan country office faced their own challenges and opportunities with the gender scan. For example, Plan Pakistan conducted focus group discussions first with its own staff and partners. This activity not only provided staff with a better understanding of gender-related concepts, but also brought home the need to look at themselves - as women and men - and the part they can play in bringing about gender equality.

Plan Vietnam added some questions of an operational nature to help focus groups to be more specific in their responses. Plan Bangladesh could not conduct focus

groups in all programme units, as riots flared up when two parties contested election dates.

Plan Asia held a regional workshop on the gender scan in Bangkok, Thailand, from 15 to 21 December 2006. The workshop provided an opportunity for representatives from participating countries to exchange experiences and discuss their initial analyses. Other organisations working to promote gender equality, such as UNICEF and UNESCO, also attended.

Following the workshop, Plan education advisors in each country used the scan's



Figure 1. Answers sought in Plan's 2006 gender scan

- Is gender equality reflected as a focus in Plan Asia's education programmes?
- In what way do Plan's education programmes address gender inequality?
- How effective are they in addressing gender inequality?
- What has made them effective or insufficiently effective?
- What do we need to do to make our education programmes gender sensitive?
- What capacity-building activities do we need so that our education programmes are more gender responsive?
- What advocacy should we undertake in addressing gender inequality?

recommendations to modify their education programme activities, as appropriate to their situation. There is no doubt that their determination to work towards gender equality was further galvanised as a result of the scan.

The cumulated qualitative data from the focus group discussions have provided the material for this report, which highlights some of the most common reasons for gender inequality and Plan's response. The report draws on the views expressed by parents, children, teachers and local officials in the communities where Plan Asia works. Their voices are heard throughout these pages, and we are hopeful they will resonate far and wide.



Barriers to girls' education and gender equality

02

To raise and care for a daughter is like taking care of somebody else's garden.

--Nepalese proverb

UNESCO statistics show that throughout Asia, girls are less likely than boys to enter primary school. The one exception is Bangladesh, where a higher proportion of girls than boys is now entering school.³

The barriers that keep girls out of school and obstruct gender equality are deep-rooted and numerous. They have been discussed in some detail in chapter 3 of the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2003/4*, which was published by UNESCO and is available on their website.

Many of the same factors came to the fore in Plan's gender scan, as indicated in figure 2. They need to be addressed not just by education interventions, but also by broader, gender-responsive attitudes in the family, the community and, indeed, at the national level. The key factors in gender inequality are analysed below.

Poverty

Of the many obstacles to girls' education, poverty is the recurring theme.

Figure 2: Key factors affecting gender inequality

- Poverty
- Child labour
- Early marriage
- The dowry
- Illiteracy
- Son preference

"How can I send my daughter to school when I can't even buy her a notebook for two rupees?"

--Mother from India

Across the region, families say it is a lack of money that prevents their children from going to school or staying in school once they have started. One family from Rambang, Indonesia, said that "by entering our children in school we hope

they can be clever and reach success in their life. We encourage our children to go to school until we don't have enough money to pay the school cost." And then the children have to leave.

Poverty in Asia is pervasive. Approximately 600 million children are deprived of at least one of their basic needs – food, drinkable water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. Over half of these children are absolutely poor, defined as severely deprived in two

or more basic needs. They live mostly in the rural areas of South Asia.⁴

What the statistics do not reveal is that gender discrimination causes girls to suffer poverty more acutely than boys. Boys are viewed as assets, because they are their parents' social security; girls are often viewed as liabilities. Nepali girls described how, during family financial crises, their parents pull them out of school while the boys continue.

Pre-school teachers in Cambodia said that

Figure 3: Two case studies of poverty from India

Munni

Munni is a 13-year-old girl from Uttar Pradesh, India. "I really want to study," she says. "I studied up to class 5, but because of circumstances, my family now keeps me at home. I do household chores and farm work. My father works as a construction labourer, when he gets work. My two elder brothers studied up to class 8. My 10-year-old brother is in class 5 and my 7-year-old brother is in class 2. But my older sister, who is 20, hasn't studied at all.

"Nobody in my family supports my studies. If I got free notebooks, maybe I could study. If others also did housework, then I would have time to study. My family talks of marriage, but I feel really bad about that."

Munni's mother said she would like to send her daughter to school, but the family does not have the money. "I would like my daughter to study, and then she could do a job and not be dependent on others for her food. It would help find her a good boy, and she would run her household better. But because of poverty we are not sending her to school."

Anwari

Anwari is aged 9 and illiterate. She lives in Bihar, India, with her parents, four brothers aged 12, 7, 5 and 4, and a sister aged 6 months. None of the children has ever attended school. Anwari's father says, "Talking of studies seems like an abuse. If there is no money, how will these children study? If we die, studies would support Anwari. She could stand on her own feet. But we are helpless."

for Khmer families, it is expensive to send children, especially girls, to school.

Almost everywhere, parents and children alike said that when families have no financial means, it is the girls who have to drop out. See two case studies from India in figure 3.

Child labour and domestic chores

Not all work done by children is considered child labour. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines child labour as “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.”⁵ Specifically, it refers to work that is dangerous and harmful to children, or that interferes with them attending school. In its most extreme forms, it involves children being enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses, or fending for themselves on the streets of large cities, often at a very young age.

Asia and the Pacific accounts for the largest number of child workers, over 122 million in total. This comprises nearly 19 per cent of the 650 million children aged 5 to 14 in the region. In many cases, children as young as 5 or 6 already do serious household chores or wage-earning labour, often in hazardous conditions. Progress in eliminating child labour is still modest compared to areas such as Latin America and the Caribbean.⁶

“I don’t like to stay at home. I like to study. There is shortage of money at home. We take loans. We work in the fields and repay loans by giving a sack of rice. I wake up at 6, work at home and in the fields, cook or else go hungry to school. After school work again up to 7 pm.”

--Gauri, age 14, Tharu tribe, India

Traditional, socio-cultural stereotypes often assign girl children and women a lesser role in society, making girls more vulnerable to exploitation than boys, particularly in some of the worst forms of child labour. Girls and adolescent women represent a large proportion of those children engaged in commercial sexual exploitation and domestic labour.

Girls involved in commercial sexual exploitation face gender-specific risks including pregnancy, early motherhood, and sexually-transmitted diseases and reproductive illnesses that may affect their child-bearing ability in later life, as well as family ostracism and social isolation. Those engaged in domestic work are often forced to work excessive hours under intolerable conditions and exposed to abusive treatment and neglect, including physical, sexual and emotional violence.

Further, data on the incidence of child labour and numbers of child workers do not include the millions of children engaged in

domestic work in their own homes, but Plan's gender scan suggests that significantly more girls are engaged in household chores and sibling-care than boys.

Child labour is a major obstacle to the achievement of the second Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education. Children in full-time work do not have the opportunity to gain an education; for those combining work and study, not only do their educational achievements suffer, but they tend to drop out of school more quickly.

Almost all children talked in this study about the work they had to do. They were unequivocal about how excessive

Figure 4. International conventions related to marriage

Free and full consent to a marriage is granted under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women has prohibitions against child marriage.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, while not explicitly addressing early marriage, grants all children the right to education, play, free expression, and protection against harmful traditional practices and all forms of abuse.

“My mother and aunt talk about my marriage. I do so much housework, yet my mother says, ‘Let’s marry her off.’”
--12-year-old girl in Bihar, India

domestic chores, work on the family land or in the family business, or external paid labour made it more difficult, if not impossible, to pursue their dream of school.

Early marriage

Many international conventions proclaim the right to consensual marriage (see figure 4). National laws on marriage age notwithstanding, many families perpetuate their own experience by marrying their daughters early on.

Early marriage is an expression of both poverty and tradition. Poor parents see marrying their daughters off as a way of securing their daughters' futures. They are also responding to social norms and values that are unsupportive of girls who 'break the mould'; indeed, parents may have little choice in their decision.

But other factors also influence this trend. These include a national legislative framework that establishes a minimum age for marriage, the extent to which these laws are enforced, and the effectiveness of a country's civil registration system in providing proof of age.

South Asia has the world's highest rate of early marriages. Of women 15 to 24 years of age, 48 per cent were married before they reached 18, compared to 42 per cent in Africa and 29 per cent in Latin America.⁷ More specifically, in Bangladesh 38 per cent of women aged 20 or above were married by the age of 15, and 65 per cent by the age of 18. In Nepal, the rates were 14 per cent by the age of

15 and 55 per cent by the age of 18.⁸ In South-East Asia, the custom of early marriage varies greatly among provinces, states and islands, sometimes in line with ethnographic patterns.

Once married, girls who previously attended school are unlikely to continue. Instead, they are expected to take on duties in the household of their in-laws.

Figure 5: Case studies of early marriage in India

Komal

Komal, age 12, lives in Uttar Pradesh, India. She attended a village school for 3 years, but never learned to read or write. After her father died, Komal left school. She believes her family is no longer interested in educating her because she will move to her in-laws' home soon. Together with her mother, she works for several hours a day doing piece-rate work stitching stars and glitter. Komal also does much of the cooking and other housework.

She said her situation has overshadowed her will to succeed. "I do not feel like studying. Circumstances have killed my desire to study," she said. "My family says it's time for my gauna (leaving for her in-laws' house), but they don't have the money to perform the ceremony. I feel angry when I hear such talk."

Sarita

Sarita, age 14, belongs to a scheduled caste in Rajasthan, India. She does housework, sibling care and agricultural work. Waking up at 5:30 she cooks, milks the cows, eats and goes to school. She likes her studies and dreams of becoming a teacher.

Sarita was married at the age of 9 months, and her parents are now thinking of sending her to her in-laws. But she says: "I don't like this. I don't believe in this marriage. I don't know if I am married or not. We were married together – my three elder sisters and myself. The eldest was 15 years old, then 10, 8 and myself not even 1 year old!"

(See case studies in figure 5.) They face early pregnancies, social isolation and often abuses that go unpunished. Where a girl's family is very poor or she has lost her parents, she may find herself married as a third or fourth wife to a much older man, to fulfil the combined role of sexual and domestic servant.

Many of the girls participating in the gender scan said that early marriage affects them badly, and their feelings ranged from exasperation to anger. It is a fate they dread, yet feel powerless to do anything about.

Dowry

Dowry is a widespread practice in parts of South Asia, cutting across socio-economic, socio-cultural and religious boundaries. Although outlawed, dowry still exists in Bangladesh, India and Nepal, dragging families into debt and poverty and presenting a significant barrier to realising the right to education for girls and adolescent women. The practice of dowry can place a significant financial burden on families and parents who will often prioritise investing in their daughter's eligibility for marriage over her health and educational needs.

When parents are unable to afford the dowry, they face either the risk that their daughters will not marry or the prospect of having to promise to pay the dowry later. And when the time comes and a family cannot honour its commitment, it

“If my daughter gets higher education, her dowry will be bigger and we will not be able to afford it. So it is better that the girl does not go to school.”

--Mother at village meeting in India

“Provision of dowry is another burden of daughters over parents. Therefore, instead of giving them an education, it is better to spend the money on wedding expenses.”

--Mother in Pakistan

is the bride who bears the consequences; she may be beaten or assaulted with acid, burned alive or put to death, or driven to take her own life (see section 6 on 'Violence').

The tacit social acceptance and responsibility of providing dowry for daughters both emphasise and exacerbate the undervalued role of girl children and gender inequity in many families and communities, particularly in patriarchal societies with son preference tendencies. Particularly, where marriage is understood as a means to better the husband's family's material circumstances, the importance attached to educating girl children in a household is undermined.

Further, education can adversely impact on a girl's chances for marriage, as an educated bride might be expected to marry an equivalently or better educated husband and consequently be expected to pay a greater dowry. Alternatively, many husbands' families would view an

educated girl with suspicion, having concerns about her suitability and preparation for her role as a wife and daughter-in-law.

Faced with such risks, it is no wonder that so many poor families take what they perceive as the practical route proven by past generations. A daughter's education must be subordinated to higher priorities; her safety and virtue as well as the family's reputation must be protected by a marriage contract at an early age and the certainty of a dowry accompanying her.

Illiteracy

Illiteracy begets illiteracy; it is caused by

“We follow the advice of our ancestors not to let our daughters learn too much because if they are able to read and write, they will write love letters to boys and this might result in their abduction.”

--Parents in Kampong Cham province, Cambodia

poverty and perpetuates poverty. In Asia, over 512 million people are illiterate. In East Asia, 71 per cent are female; in South and West Asia, 63 per cent are female.⁹

Illiteracy makes women more vulnerable to social and traditional pressure. Having been denied the opportunity to learn, illiterate mothers marry earlier, have more children, contribute to higher infant mortality and are



less likely to educate their own girl children.

The patriarchy prevailing in most societies in South and South-East Asia also works against girls' education. The decision to send and keep a girl at school lies with the fathers, a matter made worse by the high level of female illiteracy in many communities. Few illiterate women are able to persuade their husbands to send their daughters to school if the husband has decided otherwise.

Many mothers in communities where Plan works become champions for girls' literacy. However, due to gender inequality in the home and the fact that they themselves are uneducated, these women are unable to insist that their daughters learn to read.

Son preference

Girls are discriminated against from their earliest years simply because they are female. In much of Asia, this is a manifestation of patriarchy; it shows up in many ways, and in particular, in son preference.

In Nepal's rural areas, for example, parents prefer sons because they are deemed a form of social security, while girls remain a burden until married. Preference starts from infancy: sons are lactated for as long a time as possible, while daughters are lactated for as short a time as possible.

Similarly in Bangladesh, the preference for sons shows in the way boys are nurtured from birth and are fed and clothed in childhood, to how they are respected and even feared when they are grown up. In Vietnam, where ancestor worship predominates and the family lineage is very important, sons hold a significant place as they sustain the family line.

Experience tells parents that it is a son who will one day take over as head of the family and take responsibility for earning money. They believe that there is no need for girls to go to school, because they can learn the skills to manage the household from family members and the community. Furthermore, they see no point in educating a girl who will end up living with her in-laws, and think that sending a girl to school is akin to "watering a neighbour's tree".

Parents consulted in the gender scan confirmed how the societal-assigned gender stereotypes and customary laws have greatly impacted their decision to send girls to school. They mentioned that career opportunities for girls are limited, and that cultural and societal stereotypes will prevent their daughters from ever reaching important positions.

In Pakistan, teachers said that fathers are the decision makers; they give preference to their sons' education, but do not consciously plan or facilitate their daughters' education. Pakistan has a GPI

(gender parity index) of 0.81 and is seriously off track to meeting the Millenium Development Goal of gender parity in primary education by 2015.¹⁰ Son preference must be seen as symptomatic of the underlying causes.

In Vietnam, having a son at all costs often means that couples continue to try for a boy even if they are poor and have several daughters. In China, India, Nepal and Vietnam, son preference is evident in each country's skewed girl-boy ratio that favours boys. This occurs through gender selection in which the girl foetus is aborted or the infant girl child dies through neglect or infanticide.

In some Indonesian villages, girls are preferred because they can easily earn an income as domestics. This is not necessarily positive, however, because it prevents them from getting an education and it

“The level of education a woman attains makes little difference to her future, as she will end up being a housewife.”

--Parents in Indonesia

makes them more vulnerable to trafficking.

Women's chances for a long and healthy life are endangered by son preference. It puts a heavy fertility burden on them, and they are likely to have only limited access to ante-natal care and attended birth.

Even when women are literate, they tend to look up to a man as someone of higher stature and for whom they should make sacrifice. For example, many Vietnamese women are in the habit of denying their own interests – new clothes or food – in favour of their husbands and sons. They consider males more important.





How Plan helps girls overcome barriers to school attendance

03

Children everywhere have the right to a good quality education. This right is at the heart of all that Plan Asia does - from raising parent awareness and engaging with school and community leaders to advocating with central government.

Figure 6: Assistance that can help girls from poor families receive an education

- Scholarships
- Payment of ancillary school expenses, such as uniforms and books
- Reduction or waiver of local building maintenance and construction levies
- Lunch-time feeding programmes
- Transport (payment of bus fares or provision of a bicycle)
- Lodging costs for children whose families live in remote locations
- Teacher mentoring
- Provision of early childhood care and development centres to free school-age girls from childcare duties
- Opportunities to undertake flexible, non-formal schooling
- Vocational training

Working in the poorest of poor communities, Plan Asia takes a pragmatic approach. We concentrate on the education of the most disadvantaged children in the community, and we vary the specific type of assistance according to local needs. Figure 6 summarises the types of assistance we offer. Although these interventions are not targeted exclusively at girls, they can often make the difference between a family sending a daughter to school or keeping her at home.

While basic education in most of Asia is usually free, there are many ancillary expenses such as uniforms, meals, school books and supplies, and construction and maintenance fees. And although some countries have constitutions that state that primary education is compulsory and free, students may still have to pay fees. For a poor family, these costs may represent a significant part of their income.

In almost all the countries where we work, Plan responds by providing scholarships, especially for girls, at both primary and secondary education levels, to cover their expenses. While some boys also receive scholarships, our priority is to help achieve gender parity in education. Special consideration is given to the most disadvantaged who are at risk of dropping out.

“Girls’ education should be top priority because a literate mother can bring up her children a lot better than an illiterate mother.”

--Mother in Pakistan.

Plan Vietnam has negotiated with some communities in its programme areas to implement an ‘exception policy’ for building maintenance and construction levies. Although this applies to all children, it particularly helps girls to continue in school.

Plan also provides assistance in kind, based on what can make a crucial difference. For example, in Bangladesh we provide pads, pens and supplementary books. In the Philippines, Plan’s Targeted School Assistance Programme (TSAP) provides school supplies and books, as well as funding to purchase uniforms and pay other school expenses.

In Cambodia we provide shoes and clothes to poor students and implement a feeding programme for pre-school children. While these are for boys and girls alike, they impact most favourably on girls, who are usually the first to go without. Plan Cambodia is also implementing our School Improvement Programme (see annex 3).

In the more rural areas, a child’s journey from home to school is a challenge in itself. In the Philippines we either meet the transportation cost, provide bicycles or, in the most difficult situations, pay

for lodging near the school. In India we provide bicycles, too. Bicycles enable girls to reach school when it is far from home and also make their journey safer.

A special initiative in the Philippines is Plan’s Adopt-a-Child programme. Teachers ‘adopt’ a child, usually a disadvantaged girl who shows exceptional promise and has the potential to get ahead. The teacher gives her the necessary support to become educated.

These interventions may be backed up with house-to-house visits. Either Plan staff or teachers visit the homes of children known to be missing school to discuss the reasons and see what can be done.

Plan Asia assists with early childhood care and development (ECCD) programmes as well. These have two objectives: to expose younger children to proper care and early stimulation, and to remove obstacles that keep older girls away from school. By providing parents with a safe place for young children while they are working, ECCD centres spare the need for an older, school-aged sibling to remain at home baby-sitting. See the Plan India case study in figure 7.

Some families, however, cannot be convinced to school their daughters. In such cases, Plan seeks to provide out-of-school girls with skills training. In Nepal and Vietnam, for example, we support girls to attend vocational training and skills development courses.

Figure 7: Case study on girls' education from Plan India

The focus on girls' education, especially their enrolment, is a primary dimension of the Indian Government's intervention in primary education. It is an indicator closely monitored by international aid agencies as well, and there is considerable pressure on the government to ensure that girl children enrol in the primary levels. Given this, Plan India decided to put emphasis on planning and implementing programmes that can improve the retention and continuation of girl children in schools.

The project Innovative Education Programmes in India with a Focus on Girl Child was initiated by Plan India in 2002 to strengthen and consolidate existing interventions in the States of Rajasthan, Orissa and Karnataka. The first level of intervention supported early childhood care and development programmes; this has increased access to education by liberating elder girl children from having to take care of younger ones.

The second level of intervention has been in ensuring that girl children receive bicycles so that they can travel to and from school. This improved the attendance of girls in school and also contributed to their increased mobility and self esteem.

Plan has also provided support in the form of benches for the children (the girls demanded better seating, as it was difficult for them to squat on the floor in their skirts), the construction of separate and private latrines for girls and, in some cases, financial assistance to purchase school uniforms.

Plan Philippines utilises the Alternative Learning System to enable out-of-school adolescents – those who are working or who left the formal education system for too long – to attend study programmes and get a certificate of secondary education. Girls joining this programme can choose the course options that are most suitable and determine their own study schedule. Apart from equipping girls with skills, these programmes reduce the risk of girls entering risky occupations or being trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation.

Plan Vietnam's microfinance programme assists families in improving their household economic security, and especially the nutrition and education status of children. An independent evaluation of this project showed that, of the family income resulting from the loan, parents used 64 per cent on their children's educational needs such as textbooks, notebooks and other school requisites.¹¹



Gender discrimination at home

04

One son is children, two daughters are none.
--Vietnamese proverb

Unequal treatment and lack of opportunity begin at home where gender-based stereotypes are passed on from one generation to the next. However, gender roles within the family are usually determined by the socio-cultural norms and traditions of the community and reflect wider gender inequalities in society.

Understanding the concept of gender

In Asia, the concept of 'gender' is not understood clearly. In Pakistan, for example, Plan's focus group discussions began with a general discussion and explanation of gender. Mothers did not understand that it related to societal roles and responsibilities; they only knew that it had to do with male and female.

Once they understood the concept, they confirmed that boys are preferred. Boys are expected to do important, worldly things, while girls are brought up to become obedient housewives.

Children's perceptions of gender roles tend to mirror those of adults. Often they think that the way of deciding who does what is fair, as it is the way it is done in their family and the community. Pakistani children in the gender scan denied that gender inequality existed in their own community.

To help them recognise instances of gender inequality, the non-formal students were asked why they had dropped out of primary school. The girls gave reasons such as the need to help their mother with household chores, marriage and lack of money. At the same time, they said that many Quranic verses reflect on gender equity. "To get education is the right of every man and woman," one girl recited. "We keep on studying Islamic teaching of having basic education. But in real life, girls are not provided with this opportunity."

Because parents commonly perceive girls and boys as having different qualities,

they treat them differently. As parents in Dompou, Indonesia, indicated, “There is different physical capability between males and females.”

Children in Dompou reported that labour is divided between boys and girls accordingly: Boys collect grass, herd livestock, fish and work with neighbours, while girls cook, wash dishes, clean the house and care for siblings. Boys said that they do not want to do ‘girl tasks’ because they are afraid of being called a transvestite.

Finally, as demonstrated by the comments in figure 8, gender-based discrimination is not always recognised by its victims. The children’s answers reveal how gender stereotypes are deeply entrenched. Nonetheless, several girls and a few boys who participated expressed thoughts that are refreshing and give hope.

Ironically, in some countries the recognised capabilities of girls over boys have not helped girls to be treated equitably. In Cambodia and Vietnam, boys are considered clumsy, naughty and careless, whereas girls are expected to be neat, docile and versatile. Parents in Vietnam explained that because of being clumsy and careless, boys are spared from doing the household work.

These stereotypes play out in many ways, resulting in gender discrimination in many important components of daily life. These are summarised in figure 9.

Working in the home

In the gender scan in India, 95 per cent of the children interviewed indicated that girls should do housework. This is reflected in the experience of the girls themselves: 95 per cent spend at least one and a half hours every day on housework, and 33 per cent spend three hours or more. Many said that they would be punished if they did not do it.

The experience of Sabiya, a 9-year-old girl from Delhi, is typical. She wakes up at 6 in the morning and fetches milk from the dairy before going to school. When she returns home she does school work, housework, eats dinner and finally goes to sleep at around 10 pm.

Because household work has been viewed as a female responsibility for generations, it is not surprising that many girls said it was not proper for boys to do housework. As expressed by class 4 and 5 girls from Shyamkat village in Uttar Pradesh: “Boys should not do housework, it is wrong. A boy can’t make rotis, he will not know how to do so and he will not be able to learn. We will do the housework.”

They also indicated that men’s work is purposeful and sustains the family. “Girls should do housework; boys should earn outside,” said an age 10 girl from Bihar.

Vietnamese children likewise recognised that girls bear a disproportionate amount of the housework. Three-quarters of

Figure 8: Gender stereotypes from India

Plan India asked girls from different communities to comment on the following statement:

Meena is 10 years old. She likes to play cricket and go to the market. Aman is a boy. He likes playing with dolls, swinging on a swing and doing the housework. What do you feel about these two children?

Girls in Delhi, India, remarked:

Kanchan, age 10, class 5

“Housework is to be done by girls. It doesn’t feel good if boys do housework.”

Suchita, age 12, class 4

“Housework should be girls’ work. Why should a boy do it if he has a sister?”

Archana, age 11, class 5

“Girls should get what they want – cycling, marketing, going out. But boys should not cook or play with dolls.”

Girls in rural areas of Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, India, remarked:

Ranjana, age 12, class 6

“I like the story. Whether it is housework or outside work, work is work. If the boy does housework and the girl does outside work, both are working. They are not forcing one another to do anything.”

Asha, age 12, non-schooled

“I like the work that girls do – I like that only.”

Santosh, age 14, non-schooled

“I like this girl Meena. I too do not like doing the housework.”

Basanti, age 10, class 3

“It really feels good when a brother does some housework.”

Roshni, age 10, class 4

“I don’t like it if the brother does housework. But I do like to ride a cycle. I can come from school by cycle.”

Figure 9. Major components of discrimination against girls in the home

- Greater time requirement for household chores
- Lack of say in selection of a marriage partner
- Less financial support in nutrition and health care
- Emphasis on learning household skills rather than formal schooling

those in the focus groups said that girls have to do more housework than boys, while boys have more time to study. A village chief in Cambodia concurred that housework is the reason families keep their daughters at home until they are 8 years old. Some Cambodian parents explained that girls can miss out on school because “daughters will just get married, stay at home, take care of children and do housework.”

And what do the boys think? “Boys earn and study. We do not do housework because nobody tells us to. This work has become girls’ work only,” said a boy from Rajasthan, India. But a 16-year-old married girl from Rajasthan rejected traditional roles handed down by society. “I like to do outside work. It is good if the man does housework,” she said.

Choosing a partner

In Pakistan, one girl spoke for many when she voiced her exasperation over the choice of a marriage partner: “Boys and girls have forced marriages. However, boys still have a say in their choice of partner, and the parents will agree. But

if girls want to marry their own choice, parents just will not support it. If the girl decides to go ahead despite opposition, parents do not accept the couple, and they are left alone to survive.”

In Nepal, children said that parents easily accept inter-caste marriage of sons, but would never allow their daughters to intermarry. And while arranged marriage can affect both boys and girls, girls tend to suffer more from the tradition.

Financial support

Differential treatment in financial support is another expression of gender discrimination. Fathers acknowledged that boys are preferred, albeit attributing gender inequality to societal pressures.

This is why girls eat last and worst. “Delicious and nutritious food is for boys and lower quality food is for girls,” said a girl from Nepal.

In Vietnam boys are provided with more clothes, because they are perceived as naughty and careless. If girls make similar mistakes, they are punished more

severely, because parents expect girls to set a good example.

A Pakistani girl said, “When a boy leaves his job, the parents still support him, even if he is married and has children. However, if a girl does not get married, she is considered a burden.”

A schoolgirl in Nepal said that “special attention is given to sons when they become ill. They get treatment in the hospital. But parents follow the traditional way of treatment using faith healers and herbs when daughters get sick.”

Pakistani teachers concurred: “Parents and male members of the family discriminate against females in providing healthcare. They are always hesitant to provide the same care to female members of the family, even if the situation is comparatively more critical.”

Schooling

Since boys are expected to be the bread winners, parents invest in educating sons. When a family experiences hardship, girls usually drop out of school to help the family. In the Philippines, however, more boys than girls drop out, as the boys are expected to do wage-earning work.

Even when both sons and daughters go to school, they receive differential support. Many fathers consciously facilitate their sons’ education, but not their daughters’. If a boy stays away from

“We don’t get time to study because mummy makes us do all this work – cleaning utensils, floors, clothes, filling water, looking after younger brother and sisters, getting things from shops.”

--8-year-old girl from Sangam Vihar, Delhi, India

school, his parents will want to know why, but if a girl stops going, neither parent will usually bother.

In many communities in India and Pakistan, traditional thinking is that education reduces a girl’s value. As discussed in section 2, parents expect to pay a higher dowry if their daughter has some education, and this prompts parents to keep their daughters at home. Said a Pakistani female student: “We often hear that girls are becoming foolish after getting an education.”

If daughters do attend school, they usually do not continue beyond grade 5 because they get married soon after. Instead, they are expected to prepare for their future by acquiring skills in running a household, cooking and raising children.

Amidst the overwhelmingly entrenched views that contribute to the perpetuation of discrimination against girls, there are some countries in the region, especially in South-East Asia, that give hope. These are discussed in section 5, along with Plan’s efforts to promote gender equality across the Asian region.



How Plan promotes gender equality in the family

05

In carrying out the gender scan, Plan was encouraged not only by some of the comments from children in India (see figure 8), but also by comments by parents in Cambodia and Vietnam.

“I want my daughter to go to school so that she will be educated, so that she will learn about her rights – so that her husband won’t look down on her and she won’t be a victim of domestic violence,” said one mother from Cambodia. And a father collecting his children from school in Angkor Thom said, “I want my boy and girl to go to school. I do not discriminate between them. I want my girl to be literate so that people won’t look down on her.”

In Vietnam, Plan encountered evidence of a broader perspective. Most Vietnamese parents agreed that they need to pay attention to their daughters’ education, rather than only that of their sons.

Parents like these are potential change agents for gender equality in their community. The challenge is to enable them to rally other parents and create a critical mass of prime decision makers to give their daughters an education which the girls deserve and to which they have the right.

So Plan consults with families, helping them to consider which family values are positive and can be built upon, which are neutral and which can harm their children’s interests. Parents receive training in positive parenting skills. Encouragement is given to improving parent and child communication, a first step to having parents reconsider their attitude on gender roles. Plan also informs, advises and educates through forums and associations, involving the community in discussions on children’s rights, gender and education.

While this common thread of awareness raising and exchanging views connects all Plan Asia’s programmes, interventions vary in response to country-specific situations. Figure 10 summarises the types of activities Plan undertakes.

In Cambodia, Plan recruits village animators in pre-schools to raise parental awareness. We conduct monthly meetings with parents that include agenda items on gender and each child’s right to an education. Plan helps set up parent teacher associations in primary schools and parent management committees in pre-schools, and we encourage female primary caregivers to participate actively.

Figure 10: Ways in which Plan tries to develop gender equality in the home

- Raising parent gender awareness through activities such as village animators, theatre involving male and female role-playing, home visits, youth fairs and competitions on children's rights
- Holding discussions related to children's rights, gender and education at meetings of local groups and associations involving parents and community members, such as village development committees
- Setting up parent teacher associations and parent management committees in schools and pre-schools that encourage or even require women to participate
- Inviting parents to children's events that feature boys and girls in equal roles
- Offering training courses on parenting skills and household finance to both men and women
- Combining gender sensitisation with literacy, vocational and other skills training programmes
- Offering alternative modes of education to girls who are unable to attend school
- Carrying out school enrolment campaigns, including door-to-door calling and youth rallies

Plan Nepal takes a similar approach, including parenting education sessions and home visits. Through provision of flexible schooling classes, we are increasing access to education for girls who would not otherwise be able to go to school on account of household responsibilities, economic hardship or marriage.

In Pakistan, Plan employs door-to-door visits to motivate families to educate girls. Economic incentives, such as scholarships for girls from poor families, help remove financial barriers. We raise awareness about gender issues through discussions with parent teacher associations, parental education forums and talks with mothers and fathers; and through events such as

Parents' Day, Education for All campaigns and Child Rights Day.

Plan Indonesia promotes gender equality and child rights to parents by discussing basic gender principles with them. Topics cover the definition of 'gender' as a social construct, the difference between 'gender' and 'sex', the gap in the roles between men/boys and women/girls, and the importance of treating boy and girl children equally in education and leisure opportunities. We invite parents to children's events that promote equal roles for girls and boys.

Plan Indonesia helps to address the gender inequality that exists in household



economic management, an activity that is mostly done by husbands. We provide training to both men and women, so that they acquire the skills necessary to become equal partners in managing household finances. We also use school development workshops involving men and women as a venue to discuss gender-related issues. In the community learning centres we support, we make female participation an explicit priority.

In the Philippines, Plan informs parents in the barangays (the smallest local government unit) about the government's compulsory education ordinance. This provides them with the opportunity to understand the government's require-

ments and to find ways to maintain their children's education. We conduct parent effectiveness seminars to impart the need for both parents to participate in child-rearing and to treat boys and girls equally. We also encourage teachers to visit the homes of students who are absent from school and are at risk of dropping out.

Plan Bangladesh works through local groups, such as community learning forums, village development committees and school management committees, to organise school enrolment drives. Addressing families with children of both primary and high school age, these groups place special emphasis on girls.



Community meetings and discussions with teachers, officials and other local leaders form part of the mobilisation effort. Youth organisations and students themselves hold rallies for each child's right to an education.

In Vietnam, Plan promotes the rights of the child through parent associations and activities at school. Parents and teachers are trained in positive parenting skills. Interpersonal communication between parents and children is seen as the first step to getting parents to change their attitudes and beliefs on gender roles.

Plan Vietnam recruits village animators in pre-schools to raise parental awareness. We also employ 'theatre for development'

to promote gender equality. The plays portray women in dialogue with men – husbands, fathers, brothers, bosses and male colleagues. The women act out their everyday experiences, expressing their views and desire for change.

Another popular form of sensitisation in Vietnam is competitions where parents are quizzed in front of their children on their knowledge of children's rights. Held on such occasions as International Children's Day or Full Moon festivals, these competitions are fun and educational for adults and children alike.

Plan China offers gender awareness training to school and village development committees. We also

emphasise the importance of girls' education at parent teacher meetings and other school events.

Plan India facilitates fairs where a number of children from adjoining villages gather and discuss issues related to children's rights. At one fair held recently in Lunkaransar, the focus of discussion was child protection, child rights and corporal punishment.

Recognising the complex realities on the ground for families who are locked in poverty and see no easy way out, Plan often combines sensitisation with other programmes mentioned in previous sections. These include skills training, adult literacy programmes, livelihood schemes, support for early childhood care and development and so on.

Finally, in all countries, the undertaking of the gender scan has shown itself to be an excellent opportunity to sensitise parents about gender issues. Both the gender scan matrix and the focus group discussions (see annexes 1 and 2) have given parents an opportunity to reflect on and voice their views, and to discuss ways to address the problems they identify.



Gender inequality in the community

06

Men are the front legs of the elephant, while women are the back legs.

--Thai proverb

Gender-based discrimination is prevalent in most societies in Asia. Cultural practices confine males and females to household, community and political roles solely on the basis of their sex. Gender inequality in the community is evident in how society values male and female contributions and how it rewards them. Boys are viewed as assets because they will take care of their parents in their old age. Therefore, the investment in education and basic social services is primarily focused on boys.

Cultural traditions and, on occasions, feudalism in the community tend to overrule parental sentiment. Women and girls in poor communities in some parts of South Asia live in a situation in which cultural, feudal and patriarchal norms make them totally dependent on male members of the family, community, and tribal and kin groups.

Fathers, male teachers and boys participating in Plan's gender scan gave "society's pressure", meaning the influence of the community, as a reason

for their discrimination against girls. They did not see that they themselves make up the same society that perpetuates such discrimination, until girls pointed this out.

Community cultural values are the overriding determinant of people's behaviour, cutting across all other factors. The main areas of impact are indicated in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Major areas of female gender inequality at community level

- Restricted mobility
- Limitations in employment
- Dual responsibility of paid employment and housework
- Victims of domestic violence
- Greater vulnerability due to caste and lower socio-economic status
- Limited community influence

In Pakistan and India, for example, girls' education is associated with girls who are too independent and wives who are less submissive. Thus, parents are hesitant to educate girls when marriage to a good man is deemed more important. In Indonesia, the widespread view that females are gentle but cannot take good, tough decisions influences the choice of principals.

In Cambodia, Khmer tradition recognises that men are valuable workers whereas women cannot do important work. "People think women are not clever; they are slow in thinking and can't get benefits from study," said a village chief. But in Vietnam, male and female roles are seen to be changing. "Recently women's status has increased, and a larger number of women participate in politics," said a teacher.

Mobility

The most striking gender inequalities in Asia are apparent in societies where women are confined to the home and denied the opportunity to attend school or carry on outside economic activity. In some communities, particularly in rural areas, women cannot own property; and in others, they do not have identification.

Families restrict females' mobility due to the high value that society places on family honour and female modesty, stemming from the importance attached to the biological paternity of children and the need to control a woman's sexuality. "If a woman ever goes out of the house, people start staring, gossiping, criticising; they want to know where she is going and why," one woman in Pakistan said. Such gossip can lead to an accusation that dishonours her family and results in her "honour killing".

A recurrent fear for parents is the risk that their daughter will be harassed on her way to school. Sarita, a 14-year-old from Rajasthan, India, walks one hour each way to school, and she says the walk is scary with long, lonely stretches. "One day a jeep stopped near me and men started talking to me, chasing me when I started running away," she said.

The fear of abuse or molestation on the way to school prompts many parents to keep their daughters at home, working. "If my daughter goes to school and walks far, she may be raped," said a mother in Cambodia. Unfortunately, the lack of schools near their home, especially at post-primary level, has forced many girls to discontinue their education,

"Society is extremely discriminative towards males and females. It allows the male to work late hours at night, but becomes quite critical and suspicious towards a female in the same situation."
--Plan Partner staff, Pakistan

A representative of a community group in Pakistan reported that parents cannot compromise their daughters' safety and modesty for education: "I can tell you, it is very simple. We all are Muslims and the most important thing from our point of view is 'haya' (modesty) and 'parda' (veil). When our children grow up, this becomes more of a concern. We cannot compromise."

Girls are often expected to return home immediately after the end of class. Nepali teachers observed: "Girls must return to their home on time, but boys are allowed to be flexible, chatting with friends and visiting friends after school." In Kebumen, Indonesia, teachers believe that parents have to implement a strict daily schedule that consists of study time, 'shalat' (prayer) and free time, to prevent negative behaviour of female students.

The restriction on the mobility of females has a negative impact on girls' education, and hence human development. It requires re-examination of the location of schools, the provision of all girls' schools, women teachers and sustainable approaches to non-formal education.

Employment opportunities

The lack of broader social policies that are gender responsive has made it difficult for females to translate their educational achievements into economic and political success. High-performing females still face great difficulties in moving up the career ladder, often due to the percep-

tion, according to a teacher in Indonesia, that "women will have children and have to take leave."

Girls are not prioritised for higher education because parents know their daughter's chance of becoming a top official is not as likely as their son attaining such a position. "Daughters don't need to study because they won't be able to get high positions in parliament or ever get a top ranking position like a Prime Minister or President," a Cambodian parent said.

Teachers in Pakistan said this line of thinking extends to government circles. "Key organisations such as the army, air force and navy are still reluctant in equally accommodating females in their network," a teacher said. With little hope of their daughters obtaining an important job in the future, many parents see no point in spending limited financial resources to support the education of a girl who will ultimately end up living with her in-laws.

Division of labour

Surveys of gender, work and time allocation in India show that on average, women worked 7 hours 37 minutes per day, while men worked 6 hours 31 minutes per day. Of this work time, however, women spent 65 per cent in non-market activities, while men spent only 8 per cent in such activities.¹²

While some women hold desirable jobs outside the home, they take on double duty by then doing housework upon returning. A female staff member of Plan confirmed this: “I have been provided the opportunity by my parents for higher education, and allowed to work outside home. However, when I return home from work, I am expected to do the same stereotypical household chores no matter how tired I feel. But my brother does not receive the same expectations.” And even when a woman does income-earning work outside the house, she is still considered secondary to her husband.

In Pakistan one female respondent gave a vivid account of the situation girls and women face because of the dual role expected of them as income earners and caregivers. “A working woman is only an earning machine. No one cares about her feelings and emotions. She can’t have her share in property, and community people also don’t want it. Husbands are always free to do physical torture, but a woman can’t complain of her miserable life to anyone.”

Violence

Discussion of violence against females is, in many communities, a sensitive topic.

While in most cultures violence against females is expressly prohibited, domestic violence, dowry violence, “honour killings” and killing due to suspicion of adultery are common in communities. Women interviewed in the gender scan said that society views domestic violence as the woman’s fault. They have nowhere to turn.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, for example, reported that women are the primary victims of killings; they comprised 91 per cent of all victims in 2005 and 2006. Over 85 per cent were married. The most reported reason for these killings was illicit relationships.¹³

In India, there are reports of young married woman being burned alive, beaten to death or driven to commit suicide, often in relation to the dowry. Official crime statistics in India reveal that 6,822 women were killed in 2002 as a result of dowry violence, and community-level research indicates that dowry demands have played an important role in women being burned to death and in deaths of women being labeled suicides.¹⁴

Young girls know the painful consequences of not doing housework well or talking back to their husbands.

“When a girl goes to her own home after marriage, if she doesn’t know how to cook, everybody will taunt her, she will be beaten.”

--Girls from Naunia village, Uttar Pradesh, India



In Vietnam, parents in the gender scan reported that men beat their wives when they do not fulfil their tasks – cooking, cleaning or obeying their husband or parents-in-law. Despite numerous incidents, domestic violence is seen as a private affair that should not be discussed publicly.

Cambodian teachers said that violence in the home not only impacts the psychosocial well-being of women and girls, but that it also affects school

attendance noticeably. “Domestic violence at home is one of the difficulties girls are facing, aside from a shortage of study materials, clothes, money and transportation to school,” a teacher said.

Caste and socio-economic status

Community discrimination against lower social classes is widespread in Asia. A girl who belongs to a low caste or an ethnic group is significantly more disadvantaged

than a boy.¹⁵ Naina, a 13-year-old from Bihar, is among the “scheduled” caste. She attends school but has to work in the haveli (large house) to help support her family. “I like to study,” Naina said, “but there are many difficulties in my way.” In Nepal girls from the Dalit caste are more likely to be uneducated. Two-thirds of Nepali Dalits are illiterate.¹⁶

A family’s high socio-economic status can sometimes help ease gender discrimination. “Girls from rich families are able to pursue studies beyond the primary level. They are treated as equal with boys. However, girls from poor families cannot afford to go to secondary school, so people see them as occupying a lower social status than boys,” said a Plan Cambodia staff member. This illustrates the multi-fold burdens falling on girls, especially when they are poor, from ethnic minorities or migrant families, disabled, or belonging to a lower social status group.

For other children, geography is an issue. Rural conditions tend to affect girls more than boys, as males are viewed as social security for the family and their needs

are given a higher priority. “If all the rural people had the same welfare as city people, they would not worry about their life when they become old, and would not think they must have a boy to support them,” said one focus group participant in China.

On the Sri Lankan tea estates, neither boys nor girls have easy access to education because of the conditions of the plantations. Boys attend school, albeit irregularly, because they are participating in agricultural activities. But if the estate does not provide day care, and many do not, girls miss out on school altogether to take care of their younger siblings.

Community participation

Since men typically occupy positions of power in the community, both women and men internalise the message that decisions at home should be made by men. In East Lombok, Indonesia, most students said their fathers are dominant in making decisions, as they are the family heads. Only a few said that their mothers are the ones who make decisions.

“If an educated female shares her views about human rights, people around her criticise her, saying, ‘This girl is shameful because of education exposure.’”

--Participant in a consultation with stakeholders, Pakistan

“Even though women are involved, decision making is always done by men.”

--Plan Pakistan staff member

Women's participation in community-based organisations is low, mirroring their status at home. In meetings attended by both women and men, women are typically quiet. "Dominating speakers are often men who hold higher positions, not necessarily related to the project. They articulate for all," said a focus group participant in China.

At meetings in East Lombok, Indonesia, the ratio of women to men on school committees is usually about three to one. However, women are considered passive and non-influential; they become involved only when men are absent. A teacher said that "decisions are always taken by males, as they are seen as more capable and clever than females."

Another reason given for women's lack of involvement in community affairs is their schedule. They are heavily engaged in work throughout the day. Female teachers in Shaanxi Province, China, said that household work gets in the way of their participation in community activities. "We have little time to communicate with other people, to go outside to learn more. Therefore, there is little opportunity to promote our position," said a teacher.



How Plan promotes gender equality in the community

07

Plan works with community organisations to discuss sensitive issues of gender inequality. This dialogue complements our one-to-one engagement with the very poorest families. But first, we must gain an understanding of local culture and beliefs, because although we know that people's behaviour is guided by their personal values, it is at the same time governed by the dominant cultural values of their social surroundings.

Regularly exchanging views, making suggestions and offering support help to build relationships and confidence between Plan and the communities we serve. Discussions do not generally take place in the abstract, but rather, tie into

community projects that we are supporting. Some of the means by which we raise gender issues are indicated in figure 12.

We do not expect attitudinal change quickly: the poorest communities in which we work are not only traditional in their thinking but, in the absence of any national safety net, are risk averse. The dialogue takes place over a long period, both in the family household and at community gatherings.

Plan Cambodia meets every month with community leaders to discuss project activities and gather support for gender equality and girls' education. We have

Figure 12: Ways of promoting gender equality in the community

- Discussions with educational organisations such as parent teacher associations, parent management committees and community learning centres
- Discussions with the community, such as local government officials, political leaders and village development committees
- Public information and education campaigns on topical issues such as child rights, girls' education, child trafficking, domestic violence and HIV/AIDS
- Literacy projects incorporating gender issues
- Community animators and street theatre
- Radio and television advertising
- Activities during events such as Global Action Week on Education for All

established parent teacher associations in primary schools and parent management committees in pre-schools and have encouraged mothers to participate actively. We carried out an education campaign, in which we brought information on the issues of gender roles in society, child rights, girls' education, child trafficking, domestic violence and rape, corporal punishment and HIV/AIDS to the forefront of the community.

Plan Pakistan addresses attitudes of gender inequality in the community by setting up female forums. Here community animators hold a range of discussions to educate the community on the importance of basic education, with a focus on girls.

“It is a social trend to think of boys as a blessing when they grow up, but for a young girl it becomes difficult for her parents to look after her social rights.”

--Parents in Pakistan

Because many illiterate mothers prefer to keep children, especially girls, at home to help with housework and grazing cattle, Plan Pakistan carries out literacy projects for women. The expectation is that by becoming more literate, these women will be more likely to support education for their daughters.

Plan Nepal also carries out women's literacy projects. We disseminate

messages about gender equality through our Education for All campaigns, with 'edutainment' on gender discrimination through street dramas, radio and TV advertising.

Plan Sri Lanka provides public education that targets parents and communities with information on home-based early childhood care and development and child rights. In tea plantation areas, we organise discussions with employers to persuade them to provide an appropriate school environment for children.

In India, Plan aims to change community attitudes towards gender inequality through awareness raising and a girls' school enrolment drive. These interventions include the mobilisation of parents, group activities for children and the formation of girls' collectives. We also arrange education about child rights for the children themselves at residential and non-residential camps.

Plan Bangladesh meets regularly with local government, village development committees, community learning centres and school management committees. During the annual Global Action Week on Education for All, we mobilise support for children's education, holding discussions with community political leaders and government officials on child rights and gender equality. At the same time, we disseminate materials on education and communications.



In Vietnam, Plan provides training and sensitisation for community leaders and community organisations – Plan’s partners included – on education law and children’s right to education. We organise community-wide sensitisation meetings to address beliefs and attitudes on the traditional roles of girls and boys, and arrange parent contests on child rights. We also undertake advocacy with families to convey the importance of girls’ education.

community thinking, and then help members of the community to understand the different aspects of gender inequality and take action to address it.

Looking ahead, Plan expects the gender scan to continue. We think it will prove a particularly valuable tool to assess



Gender inequality in schools and the education system

08

Just as gender inequality in the home and community exists in many different forms, so it does within the education system. Instead of being institutions that disseminate knowledge and make progress towards eradicating gender inequality, schools can, paradoxically, have the opposite effect.

Gender inequality in education is evident in many ways. There are obvious indicators, such as the rates of school enrolment, retention, drop-out and completion. There are also more subtle reflections, such as how girls are treated

in the classroom and on the playground, what educational experiences girls have as compared with boys, and ultimately, their learning outcomes. Some of the most common indicators are shown in figure 13.

There is no gender equality in schools where teachers are insensitive to gender issues, teaching materials are biased, girls are discouraged from being active participants, or violence and harassment prevail. Teachers, both male and female, often reflect the male-dominated attitudes of society in what they do at

Figure 13: Common indicators of female gender inequality in education

- Lower enrolment and completion rates for girls
- Skewed male-female teacher ratios
- Biased curriculum and textbooks
- Lack of opportunity for class participation and choice of subjects
- Harrassment or bullying by teachers and male students
- Corporal punishment by teachers and parents
- Lack of separate and private toilet facilities
- Lower learning achievements
- Limited access to extra-curricular activities and sports

school. It can be seen through their using 'gender-tailored' punishments, giving boys leadership positions, granting girls fewer opportunities to speak out in class, and having low expectations of girls' potential.

Enrolment and completion

In almost all countries where Plan has conducted its gender scan, primary education is free and compulsory. In some cases, as in China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, education is compulsory to grade 9. Yet, despite such progressive policies, many children in these countries remain out of school.

The 2007 Education for All Global Monitoring Report indicates considerable progress in closing the gender gap in primary education in most Asian countries. Still, the picture remains gloomy for children in slums or remote areas, and particularly so for those belonging to the lowest socio-economic groups – generally speaking low caste, minority and disabled.

In Plan programme areas, where the whole community is usually very poor, gender disparity in primary education is marked. In the areas where Plan works in Pakistan, only 55 per cent of girls enrolled in primary education complete it, as compared to 63 per cent of boys.¹⁷

While the gender gap may be closing among primary school students, girls are

still disappearing from the rosters before they reach secondary school. According to the *Education for All Report*, China as a whole achieves parity between boys and girls in transition from primary to secondary education.¹⁸ However, in Plan China's programme areas, only 42 per cent of girls complete basic education (grade 9) compared to 47 per cent of boys. In Plan Pakistan programme areas, only 22 per cent of girls are enrolled in post-primary education compared to 36 per cent of boys.

In rural Pakistan, it is not uncommon to find that the few girls who were enrolled in primary school drop out before they complete it and hardly any of them progress beyond grade 5. In some middle schools, there is an absence of girls altogether.

"The girls grow physically after passing primary school and due to social restrictions on adolescent girls, they are not allowed to go outside of the home."

--Mother in Pakistan

In some countries, however, the outlook is more positive. A girl student in Kampong Cham, Cambodia, spoke on behalf of many when talking about secondary education: "By studying further, we will have a good future, we'll be cleverer, we'll be protected from trafficking and we'll be able to get high salaries." Similar views were expressed by

Indonesian students when they refused to accept the prioritisation of boys to continue their education; they preferred a priority based on capability.

In the Philippines and Sri Lanka, the secondary education gender gap actually favours girls. In Sri Lanka, for every 100 girls enrolled in secondary school there are 96 boys. In the Philippines, for every 100 girls there are 91 boys.¹⁹ Girls overtake boys not only in enrolment, but also in retention and cohort survival rates.

Philippines' teachers said that the inverted gender disparity results from the social expectations that boys have to earn income for the family while girls have to behave well in school and listen intently to teachers. Most teachers feel it is also linked to girls having a greater commitment to learning than boys have, and to their lower repetition and higher graduation rates.

Male-female teacher ratio

A predominance of male teachers has a significant effect on girls' continuation in school in South Asian countries. The lack of female teachers makes parents feel insecure about sending their daughters

to school. In Pakistan, there are so few female teachers that schools are forced to combine several grades into one. In Plan programme areas, some female primary school teachers may be teaching as many as 80 girls at the same time. In Bangladesh, an unspoken policy is to prefer female teachers, but due to the scarcity of teachers, more men fill the role than women.

Gender inequality can also be seen in the division of responsibilities among teachers. In Dompu, Indonesia, teachers of first, second and third grade students are mainly female, with males teaching the higher grades. There is a perception that female teachers are more patient and motherly, and therefore more appropriate to teach the lower grades. Students in Kebumen, Indonesia, described their female teachers as kind, patient and non-temperamental, and said that they never imposed hard punishment.

The male-dominated mentality is particularly evident in how school leadership is perceived. In Rembang, Indonesia, many teachers believe that women do not make good school principals because they cannot be as tough as men. A male principal is viewed

“In a few villages a secondary school exists, but the teachers are male so parents don't allow girls to attend.”

--Staff member from Plan partner organisation in Pakistan

as dexterous and wise, whereas a female principal is seen as disciplined and friendly. One teacher said that “a female principal would not work optimally as she has to leave when she is pregnant and this will affect the dynamics of her school.”

However, in East Lombok, Indonesia, most teachers said they prefer women principals. The reasons they gave were that female principals are more talkative, less aggressive and less mobile.

Curriculum and teaching materials

The curriculum is about what children learn at school. Depending on how it is designed, what it contains and how it is delivered, the curriculum can be crucial in either perpetuating or reducing gender stereotypes and misconceptions.

When girls’ needs are taken into account in curriculum content and delivery, it is of greater use for them. It will motivate parents to send them to school. However, when the curriculum reflects gender bias, it contributes to maintaining social inequalities. Gender-based misperceptions about the roles of men and women mould boys and girls into those roles while they are at school.

An analysis of the textbooks in Uttar Pradesh, India, revealed that in all but one, the stories, poems and plays have only male characters, and all of them

have stereotyped roles. In the only story with a female character, she appears prominently in the beginning; as the story progresses, however, her strength and importance fade away.

In one textbook analysed in Delhi, India, there are three stories that have only males as their characters. The other seven stories with both male and female characters show them in their stereotyped roles: the female characters are caring, weak, cunning and docile, while the male characters are strong, brave and more extroverted.

Taking such textbooks as the truth, the majority of girls and boys will not challenge what they learn. It is no surprise that children, taught to internalise such roles from very early on, will reproduce them.

“In the lessons it is said: Father goes to his office while mother cooks.”

--Student in Rembang, Indonesia

In most countries the curriculum does not include information about children’s rights and responsibilities, nor about reproductive health for adolescents. Sex education at school remains off-limits in many cultures, even though basic knowledge on reproductive health is crucial for adolescent girls. Neither do the girls get such information at home. Many mothers do not discuss the topic, because they think their children will get the information from their friends.

“There’s no need for teachers to teach about sex education, as students will know naturally by themselves.”

--Teacher in Rembang, Indonesia

This lack of crucial information affects females more than males. Girls face disproportionate health concerns following puberty. Foremost among these are early pregnancies and frequent childbearing.²⁰ Though some teachers believe that students are not mature enough, even in the fifth and sixth grades, many cultures consider that girls become women at the age of 10 and marry them off shortly after. (See section 2).

Participation in school activities

Children have the right to freedom of expression and access to information. Many girls are deprived of these rights simply because they are girls. Both female and male teachers tend to discourage girls from speaking up in class. As a consequence, girls do not participate frequently. They are then perceived as shy by their teachers, who neglect to persuade them to participate.

This carries over to leadership activities. For example, in Rembang, Indonesia, when a class is choosing its leader, teachers often ask, “Is there a boy able to take on this responsibility?” In Dompu, Indonesia, it is common for boys to become the weekly ceremony commander,

as “boys usually possess a loud voice,” said one teacher.

Teachers who are not gender sensitive perpetuate gender discrimination in education in other ways as well. In at least three-quarters of the schools that Plan staff surveyed in India, teachers make sexist comments about girls’ roles. In at least half the co-educational schools, teachers pay more attention to boys, allocate work on a gender basis and organise separate seating for girls and boys.

“Girls cannot participate in meetings since they cannot express their ideas.”

--Parent from Kampong Cham province, Cambodia

In one senior school in Rajasthan, girls are denied sports and science laboratory facilities. During the lunch break they are confined to a designated room. The gender-biased atmosphere is discomforting for girls, creating low self-esteem. It prejudices learning and pushes them into leaving school.

The choice of subjects for study in middle and high school is another area where gender stereotypes are evident. Girls in Uttar Pradesh, India, are required to take Home Science while boys take Agricultural Science. In Pakistan, “girls are discouraged from taking subjects which are so-called only for men, like engineering,” said a staff member from

one of Plan's partner organisations. A teacher in East Lombok, Indonesia, said, "Girls are good at art lessons, as women are more graceful and often use feelings."

In the Philippines, however, a totally different approach is used. Teachers in the city of Cagayan challenge gender stereotypes by opening up non-traditional vocations to girls and boys – for example, carpentry for girls and cooking for boys.

Harassment and abuse

Harassment and abuse are major factors in girls dropping out of school. Fear for a daughter's safety and family honour pose great concerns for parents.

In India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, sexual harassment of women by men is called 'eve teasing', and it can range from making sexually suggestive comments to groping or molestation. In Pakistan, the boys themselves reported that boys hang around in the streets and tease girls. They agreed that this is one reason that parents stop girls from going to school.

In Vietnam, most girls complained that boys like teasing them, but sometimes go beyond teasing. "The boys go so far as to hug and kiss girls – and boys even slap girls, beat or punch them," said one girl. If girls report such an occurrence, the teachers dismiss it as a harmless prank. Teachers do not seem to see such incidents as abuse that can seriously affect girls.

Once girls reach puberty, parents become afraid that they will be sexually harassed on the way to school or in school by male teachers and students. In countries where the Hudood Ordinance applies, a raped or molested girl has to have four male witnesses to corroborate her story or else face prosecution for adultery.

This possibility is more than enough for parents to keep their maturing daughters at home. "Parents are afraid to send their girls to school, because they will be far from them. Here we do not have separate education facilities for our girls, and we cannot send them to the boys' school," a member of the Pakistani Education Committee said.

"When a girl is harassed on the street, she is stopped from going out to pursue education."

--Staff member from one of Plan's partner organisations in Pakistan

Sexual harassment poses a powerful barrier to girls' and young women's access to education and their ability to benefit from it. It is a factor both in influencing parents to keep girls out of school and for girls themselves to avoid school. The consequences of sexual harassment on girls are many. In addition to physical and psychological trauma, young girls face the consequences of rape – ostracism, unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion and sexually transmitted infections, including the HIV virus.²¹

Policies regarding sexual abuse differ from school to school and enforcement is problematic. In some Indonesian schools, teachers agree to punish the sexual offender as he has betrayed the most basic moral values, while in other schools, violations go unpunished. Sometimes offending teachers are simply moved to another school. In Bima, Indonesia, some teachers were more concerned about what would happen to an offending teacher's family than about the wellbeing of the child.

Corporal punishment

Corporal punishment adds to other constraints and affects both girls and boys. In most cultures, discipline is considered necessary for a child. This often includes corporal punishment by both parents and teachers. The Vietnamese saying, "If you love a child, you have to give them a rod when needed; and if you don't care about a child, then you give them only sweet and good things," is still often heard. While positive discipline is helpful to children, corporal punishment is harmful and often has the opposite effect on them.

In communities where violence is the norm, corporal punishment is often accepted and passes unpunished.

Corporal punishment includes a wide variety of actions such as hitting, slapping, spanking, punching, kicking, pinching, shaking, shoving and choking, as well as the use of various objects, such as wooden paddles, belts, sticks, pins and hands. In Dompu, Indonesia, for example, teachers punish students by hitting them with a ruler, pulling their ears, pinching them, or forcing them to stand up in front of the class or run around the school yard.

School health and safety

In South Asian countries, the lack of separate latrines for girls amplifies parents' fears for their daughters' safety. Parents often withdraw girls from a school that does not offer adequate facilities.

In Pakistan, government officials say many schools lack toilets and other appropriate facilities like boundary walls and security arrangements. In a country where co-educational classes are discouraged, the lack of separate, private latrines for girls is a serious problem. "Here we do not have separate education facilities for our girls. We cannot send them to the boys' school," a member of a community-based organisation said.

"For the last 10 days we weren't given food – midday meal at school. I feel bad because I feel hungry, very hungry. But if I can't complete my homework, I am beaten badly [by the teacher]."
-- Gauri, age 14, Tharu tribe, India

In other parts of Asia the lack of separate and private latrines for girls may not lead to dropout, as in South Asia. Nevertheless, it presents a considerable inconvenience and discomfort for girls while they are in school, especially when they are having to deal with menstruation and related issues of personal hygiene.

In Vietnam, teachers said that the girls' toilets are not safe because they are not private, but in plain view. Therefore, the girls hesitate to use them.

In Cambodia, some schools provide separate latrines for boys and girls. Girl students from Kampong Cham are fortunate to have separate latrines and are satisfied with their school environment. "We are happy to go to school. It is clean, has separate toilets for boys and girls, a fence, and a nearby well," said one student.

Unfortunately, not all schools have such facilities. Other Cambodian girls said their schools had toilets, but they were always locked. The school director explained, "It is hard to maintain the cleanliness of these toilets."

This situation is not uncommon in other countries. Instead of finding ways to enable students to take responsibilities for the hygiene of the school latrines, school management does not let students use them.

Learning achievement

Learners' achievements in school are shaped first and foremost by the opportunities for learning that are presented and the kind of instruction that is provided. Apart from girls' limited learning opportunities, teachers' low expectations of their capability and the relevance of their education for the future work against their achieving good learning outcomes.

The way teachers treat girl students in and out of the classroom makes it extremely difficult for them to become confident and learn well. A curriculum that contains gender stereotypes fosters girls' doubts about their capacity and role in society.

In reality, when girls are enrolled and given a chance, they tend to do better than boys at school. Teachers in Rembang, Indonesia, said, "Girls are more active and diligent, and dominate as the best students in school. Girls obey more and are clever to understand lessons."

This has been a trend in some countries, such as the Philippines, where girls have overtaken boys both in enrolment and in performance.²² Teachers in the Philippines tend to like female students because, said one teacher, "they are well behaved and conscientious with their studies." In Vietnam, teachers reported that girls had better academic records than boys, because they studied better.

Although in many countries girls perform better than boys at school, girls are still unable to capitalise on their academic advantage. Evidence shows that men's educational underachievement, where it exists, has not resulted in their falling behind economically or politically.²³ The reality is that males largely occupy the most important positions, from community to central government.

Sport and other extra-curricular activities

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child assures all children the right to play and participate in recreational activities regardless of sex, class, caste, ethnic minority, religion or disability.²⁴ While extra-curricular activities may not directly affect students' academic achievements, sports and extra-curricular activities enrich children's education and their overall wellbeing. They enable them to be children.

"Generally in sports lessons, boys are better than girls as boys are healthier and stronger."

--Teacher in East Lombok, Indonesia

In Pakistan and some parts of Sri Lanka, girls are not allowed to participate in sports and extra-curricular activities. It is not considered proper for girls to be involved. In Nepal girls are limited to skipping and playing with toys, whereas

boys can play football and other physical games. In Indonesia, volley ball is for girls, while football and sepak takraw are only for boys.

What would children say about this if they were free to choose activities? Meera, a 10-year-old from Uttar Pradesh, spoke for many when she said that girls should not be limited from participating in physical activities. "It is good if the girl rides a bicycle, does outside work, plays," she said.



How Plan promotes gender equality in schools and the education system

09

Gender inequality permeates the education system so deeply that there is no single set of solutions. Even though the teachers and principals have relatively good educations themselves, they are inheritors of their society's pervasive discrimination and they pass it on to students.

Therefore, Plan's approach is to address the issues as much with the faculty as with the curriculum and the school facilities. The key areas where Plan provides assistance to address the multiple factors within the education system that work against gender equality are outlined in figure 14. In parallel, we support social mobilisation to promote girls' education and non-formal education opportunities.

Building teacher capacity

Sensitising teachers on gender issues is one path to gender equality. Plan conducts training on a range of topics that aim to help teachers become change agents for gender equality. During such training sessions, teachers acquire information on children's rights, gender issues and ways to act in a gender-sensitive manner. They also act out gender stereotypes and discuss root causes of gender-based discrimination.

As teachers get trained in using child-centred methodology, they learn different ways to encourage girls to participate in the classroom. In countries undergoing curriculum reform, Plan helps with the training of teachers to use the new

Figure 14: Key areas for addressing gender inequality in local schools

- Building teacher capacity related to gender equality
- Strengthening school management committees
- Creating child-friendly school environments using Plan Asia's School Improvement Programme
- Providing life skills programmes
- Offering vocational training
- Setting up community-managed secondary schools for girls

curriculum from a gender perspective. Teachers in China said that their exposure to such training helps them to assess their teaching practices through a gender lens and to realise how some of their practices can be discriminatory to girls.

School principals receive training on gender issues as part of a programme to strengthen school management capacity. The aims are to help school principals become more understanding and supportive of female teachers, adopt measures to establish a girl-friendly school environment and maintain close communications with families.

Strengthening school management committees

Plan believes in community and children's participation in school affairs. Through such participation, parents and other members of the community can demand that schools become accountable to them. In most countries, school management committees exist as a means for such participation. Yet in practice, they are often ineffective.

Plan supports the strengthening of capacity so that committee members can participate effectively in school life. As a result, the committee members are able to take part in discussions and monitor the progress of school projects.

For example, in Bangladesh, Plan has motivated school authorities and

committee members to construct separate latrines and sanitation facilities for girls. Moreover, it has persuaded women to be members of the committee and has encouraged them to bring up issues and voice their opinions.

In many places, committee members have become vocal advocates on issues such as teacher absenteeism or mistreatment of students. School management committees that Plan supports are asked to talk to school personnel and local authorities whenever there are incidents of child abuse and to seek solutions.

Creating child-friendly school environments

A girl-friendly school is one that is safe and healthy for all children. It enables girls – and boys – to attend school regularly and learn effectively. Girl-friendly school environments take gender into account by having competent and motivated teachers, giving girls the same opportunities as boys to learn well, mobilising the participation of children and their parents, and providing relevant content and appropriate delivery of the curriculum.

Making the school environment conducive to learning is one of the eight key areas of Plan's School Improvement Programme (see annex 3). This concerns both the physical and emotional wellbeing of the children, and especially girls. It encourages seating arrangements

“In the past I treated boys more strictly, but went easier on the girls. I would give boys more opportunities to answer questions in class, or come to the blackboard and write. But now I do things differently – boys and girls have the same opportunity.”

--Teacher in China after receiving Plan training on gender

that are girl-friendly, girls’ access to separate latrines and water supply, adequate security and overall school facilities that are safe and healthy. It also requires appropriate intervention when girls are harassed or abused.

In some cultures, for example, a girl-friendly environment means having a boundary wall around the school grounds. Plan Pakistan has been supporting this. In India, Plan provides support for residential and non-residential girls’ education camps. In parallel to the provision of school facilities, Plan staff and partners encourage teachers to make sure girls have ready access to any new equipment and supplies that Plan has provided, because it often happens that even when schools have equipment and libraries to support learning, they are kept locked and students are not allowed to use them.

Plan India has conducted research in 40 schools on the push-pull factors of girls’ access to education. The research found

that, in general, the schools were not girl-friendly. There were too many factors making girls uncomfortable, unhappy and discouraged, finally pushing most of them out of the system. Nonetheless, there were some factors present, scattered in different schools, that had a positive impact on girls’ retention. Figure 15 summarises the factors brought up by the respondents.

Replication of girl-friendly schools on a larger scale would create girl-friendly communities that include empowerment programmes for women, counselling and support for families in difficult situations, and safe spaces for girls’ collectives to meet, work and learn.

Providing life skills programmes

Recognising that life skills are very important for all children, but particularly girls in disadvantaged areas, Plan supports several life skills programmes in Asia. Support for girls’

Figure 15: Factors that keep girls in school or that push them out

What keeps girls in school

Concerned, affectionate teachers
Female teachers
Good/active teaching
Attention to weaker students
Good learning levels
All-girl schools
Positive parent-teacher interaction
School close to home
Viable transport
Teachers sensitive to girls' issues
Teachers who do not beat students
Bathrooms that function
Drinking water
Sensitivity to children's emotions
Peer group of girls attending school
Low cost of education
Scholarships as per need
Mid-day meals
Teachers who respect girls' needs
High/balanced ratio of girls to boys
No fear of teacher/school/studies
Parents protective, but not anxious
Safety in school and en route
Teachers who provide guidance when needed
Parents who value education
Low level of household duties
Less need for female child labour
No pressure for early marriage
Educated girls preferred for marriage
Positive role models
Girls who are healthy
Health care in school
No disability or illness in family
No crisis in community
Non-formal education or other help on studies
Bridging courses and camps linked to school
Stable and caring family members
Stable family livelihood
Flexible school timing

What pushes girls out of school

Hostile, unkind teachers
No female teachers
No/bad/passive teaching
No special attention to weaker students
Low learning levels
Co-education
Poor parent-teacher interaction
School far from home
No viable transport
Teachers insensitive to girls' issues
Teachers who beat students a lot
No functional bathrooms
No drinking water
No sensitivity to children's emotions
No/few girls from village attending school
High cost of education
No scholarships
No/low-quality mid-day meals
Teachers who do not respect girls' needs
Few girls, many boys in class/school
Fear of teacher/school/studies
Parents overprotective or too anxious
School or route unsafe
Teachers who provide no counselling
Parents who devalue education
Major burden of household duties
Tasks, like grazing goats, to earn income
Pressure of early marriage
Uneducated girls preferred for marriage
Lack of positive role models
Girls who have poor health and nutrition
No health care in school
Disability or severe illness in family
Drought, flood or other crises in community
No assistance with studies
No courses for out-of-school girls
Death of parent or unstable family
Unstable family livelihood
Rigid, standardised school timing

health education, leadership training, counselling/mentoring at school transition and exit points with links to vocational education, child-to-child mentoring, children's clubs and children's media has made a difference to the lives of many girls.

Plan Cambodia recruits and trains girl counsellors. These girl counsellors follow up on younger girls when there are problems with school performance, absenteeism, dropping-out or sickness. This helps the younger girls to progress and older girls to gain more confidence.

Plan Pakistan provides leadership training to girls – and boys. Experience in traditional communities has taught us to be pragmatic, which means that interventions like this one must include boys as well. Otherwise, community resistance will result in girls being unable to benefit.

In the Philippines, Plan has set up child-to-child mentoring. In this programme, children who are members of children's associations or who are good performers in class provide tutoring to students who need further guidance.

Plan Sri Lanka has worked with the Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Education to scan the curriculum and identify opportunities to integrate life skills, such as adolescent sexual and reproductive health, alcohol and substance abuse prevention,

rational household income management and school health and hygiene.

Children's groups facilitated by Plan Vietnam open up the opportunity for all children to participate in activities to improve learning outcomes. At the same time, girls are singled out for preparatory coaching and for participation in student clubs and activities.

In China, many girls have been trained to be reporters. They conduct interviews and write reports on what goes on in their school. Such experience not only increases their self-esteem, but also makes going to school enjoyable and fun.

Career guidance for girls, orientation on substance abuse and provision of information on adolescent reproductive health are other programmes supported by Plan in the Philippines, Sri Lanka and other countries.

Offering vocational training

Vocational training based on market and family needs are supported by Plan in India and Vietnam. Girls from poor families get well designed training that guarantees them work after graduation. An initial close connection with employers helps tailor the courses to the needs of the labour market. Girls have studied such traditionally boys-only vocations as informatics and hotel management, and have proved themselves as capable. In the Philippines, courses that traditionally



were dominated by boys are now open to girls, and vice versa.

In Gunung Kidul, Indonesia, practical family needs are behind Plan's decision to support local schools in developing an animal husbandry programme. This has helped keep girls, and boys, in school. Many parents would otherwise want their children to be collecting grass for animals' feed, rather than going to school.

Establishing secondary schools for girls

Setting up secondary schools for girls is an initiative of Plan Pakistan. The aim is to

help girls in rural Pakistan who are forced to stay home due to a lack of a secondary school for girls in their village.

This is no small undertaking, especially when Plan Pakistan persuades the communities to manage the schools themselves. Plan provides monetary support for teacher salaries, school furniture, and technical assistance in teacher selection and training. It builds the capacity of local community education committees in school management, financial management and community mobilisation so that they can oversee school construction, manage school assets (for example,

Figure 16: Case study from a community school in Pakistan

“The other girls of the community school and I want to make our future bright. I want to further continue my studies. My parents are also very pleased with my education because education spreads light in the dark.

Now I support my younger brothers and sisters in their studies. I do not want to see my brothers and sisters experiencing the same hardships that I faced. Now I can differentiate between what is good and what is not good. All this has happened due to education.

After seeing us, people of our village have become aware about the importance of education. Now those people who were against the education of girls are sending their daughters and sisters to the school.”

--Nagina, grade 9, Community School, Pakistan

collect fees, and generate and administer local resources) and keep an eye on school affairs.

And they raise awareness among parents about girls’ education. The effect of such community-managed schools on girls, their families and other community members can be heard through the words of Nagina, a ninth grader from a community school in Pakistan (see figure 16).



The way forward

Addressing deeply ingrained gender bias and its destructive effect on girls' right to education and women's empowerment is a formidable task. It is a process that requires commitment and patience extended over a long period. The capabilities to listen to people, both vocal and quiet, is the first crucial step for any success.²⁵

In this report the voices of children, parents, teachers, Plan staff and partners are telling us the realities on the ground. They express their feelings and biases, their sense of hopelessness and – for some – their hopes and their dreams. While bringing the complex nature of gender-based discrimination into focus, they remind us that single actions to tackle individual aspects of gender

inequality will not bring about substantial change. Instead, it will require many and diverse initiatives, pursued by organisations from village councils and citizens' groups to university researchers and central government.

The people interviewed – young and old, male and female – have made suggestions for change. Their voices and recommendations will guide our efforts and galvanise our determination to accelerate the achievement of gender equality. Figure 17 identifies some of the actions that, based on Plan's experience, we think will be helpful and practical. They are discussed in greater detail below.

Figure 17: Suggested actions for achieving gender equality

- Advocacy and sensitisation in the family and local community
- Advocacy with national governments
- Gender training programmes for behavioural change
- Social mobilisation
- Implementing Plan's School Improvement Programme (SIP)
- Scaling up of programmes and partnerships

Advocacy in the community

Advocacy and sensitisation in the home, school and community are a prerequisite for change. Listening, discussing, adapting, informing and persuading are the essential elements. But it should not be assumed that change will come about in a short time. Root causes of gender inequality may be too deep-seated to be capable of quick resolution. A sense of modesty and an understanding of the complexities of a poor family's struggle for survival are mandatory.

Approaches that work in one set of circumstances may not be replicable in another. We must remain open to new ideas, to innovation. For example, advocacy for girls' education is typically targeted at mothers. Should fathers – the family decision makers – be equally involved? Or another example: Would discussions with a girl's family be sufficient to persuade her parents to pay for her education rather than her dowry? Should the family of the boy who will marry the girl also be sensitised?

Just as advocacy with the family calls for understanding and patience, so the same applies when planting the seeds of change with teachers, principals, community associations, local leaders and representatives of the national government.

Advocacy with the national government

Change in communities can be neither sustained nor easily scaled up unless it is supported at the national level by gender-responsive policies, legal frameworks and enforcement. Thus, advocacy is needed both downstream at the community level and upstream in central government.

The range of gender-linked topics to discuss with national governments is broad and priorities will vary. Local, national, and external organisations may choose to work collectively or separately. Figure 18 provides a brief overview of the issues that Plan Asia believes are important to achieving gender equality in education.

First priority must be given to making the national curriculum gender sensitive, and recruiting and training teachers who can break the cycle of gender discrimination. The second priority is to address related issues that can impact on girls' education more generally.

While some of these steps have budget implications, others have little or none. For example, the costs associated with seeking stakeholders' feedback on the curriculum are negligible.

Gender training for behavioural change

The challenge is how to make sure that knowledge and understanding of gender issues motivate people to change their behaviour. Even with the right mix of communication channels and tools, people will take a long time to change. Or they may not change at all, especially when the status quo is advantageous.

Plan Asia has used a variety of gender training modes for teachers, mothers and fathers, and girls and boys - from direct information dissemination to fun events and theatre. Their aim is to change people's mentality and behaviour with regard to gender roles. Experience shows that such sensitisation should not be a one-off activity. It needs to be conducted regularly to strengthen participants' understanding and

Figure 18: Steps to achieving gender equality in education

- Review the curriculum and make changes based on principles of gender equality and children's rights
- Eliminate gender bias and stereotypes in curricular resources, such as textbooks
- Promote child-centred and gender-responsive methods of curriculum delivery through periodical teacher training and follow-up support
- Articulate a teachers' code of conduct in pre-service education and reinforce it in in-service training
- Increase the ratio of female to male teachers, especially in the upper primary grades and secondary school
- Build more schools and residential facilities to overcome distances to school, to eliminate child protection risks in travelling
- Provide affordable and accessible early childhood care and development centres that are home-based or near primary or secondary schools
- Enforce the legal age of marriage and labour
- Put in place measures to prevent sexual harassment and corporal punishment in schools
- Prohibit schools from levying unofficial fees on parents
- Improve education management information systems and disaggregate data according to sex, socio-economic status and geographic location to monitor progress
- Institute a system for all stakeholders – children, parents, teachers and school administrators – to provide feedback on the curriculum
- Offer incentives, both cash and non-cash, for exemplary teachers, especially female teachers

reinforce the gender-sensitive practices they acquire.

An effective training programme does not limit the discussion to gender issues alone and in the abstract. It needs to be dovetailed with training in other sectors, both in terms of organisation and content. For the training to be effective, it should not present a burden to the target groups. The reasons are simple: if you are a poor farmer and you are asked to attend several meetings a week to discuss a different issue each time, you will not have much time left to work for your family's survival. And you will probably not have much enthusiasm for such meetings either.

Hence, integrating gender issues with training in other topics, such as teaching methodologies, health, child rights and child protection, school improvement or early childhood care practices, will make the best use of the little time that participants can spare. Concrete examples from different topics are helpful. There must be opportunity for participants to open up, pose questions and express their views.

Gender training is needed not just for teachers and parents. Everyone involved with facilitating gender sensitisation requires a comprehensive understanding of gender issues. The same holds true for staff of Plan, its partners and officials at the ministry of education and other government agencies.

Social mobilisation

Plan has been supporting social mobilisation in all countries where we work. We organise social mobilisation on a range of themes: education, gender, health, and water and environmental sanitation, to name a few.

Social mobilisation brings people together to raise awareness and achieve a particular objective. It involves identifying the organisations, institutions, groups, networks and other persons who can contribute. In the process, it builds the capacity of these groups so that they can garner resources, plan, carry out and monitor activities.

One example of social mobilisation for gender equality is taking shape in Sri Lanka. After Plan conducted its gender scan, school administrators, teachers, parents and students committed themselves to identify monitoring indicators and a participatory evaluation framework. They will establish a matrix of roles and responsibilities for the school principals, teachers, school development societies, community representatives and students in tackling the problems they will address in 3 to 5 years. Plan will provide technical and financial support to the provincial ministries of education to establish the school management committees to manage school budgets and oversee administration.

Figure 19: Social mobilisation activities to promote gender equality

- Establish female forums and girls' groups to help identify gender-related needs and suggest interventions, as well as to strengthen their voice
- Carry out joint gender advocacy efforts at the national level with agencies such as ministries of education, ministries of health and ministries of women's affairs
- Carry out joint gender advocacy efforts at the local level in partnership with non-government organisations and UN agencies
- Work with local communities to ensure a commitment to girls' education through information and education campaigns and by highlighting role models
- Strengthen partnerships with academic organisations to carry out gender research
- Develop relationships with the media to report stories debunking gender stereotypes and promoting positive gender outcomes
- Offer courses on issues such as gender-responsive planning, gender mainstreaming, preparation of gender-responsive information and teaching materials, and monitoring and evaluating gender-responsiveness in projects
- Integrate gender issues into project proposals
- Seek funding and in-kind resources from government, donors and development organisations to promote and facilitate gender equality in the community

Social mobilisation for gender equality can be enhanced by a number of activities. Some of these are listed in figure 19.

Scaling up programmes and partnerships

Each organisation that is helping governments and communities to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of gender parity in education and the empowerment of women evolves in its own

way to arrive at a successful outcome. For Plan Asia, the School Improvement Programme (SIP) is highly relevant.

SIP uses an octagonal framework to identify the eight elements that are indispensable for all children to attend school and achieve successful learning outcomes. It shows the elements that are being well taken care of, as well as the ones that need attention and the people who need to attend to them. Annex 3 gives details of the octagon framework and explains the eight elements.

Based on the gender scan and SIP, Plan has identified a number of education interventions, as indicated in figure 20.

The gender scan plays an essential role in checking that every aspect of the eight elements of SIP are implemented in a gender-sensitive way. The details of the gender scan instruments – the matrix and the focus group discussion questions – are given in annexes 1 and 2. It is important to conduct a gender scan every two or three years to ensure that education programmes maintain a high level of gender sensitivity.

For these programmes to be effective and to reach out to as many children as

possible, especially the hardest-to-reach, Plan partners with like-minded development organisations, including community-based organisations. Plan has been working with partners at local level and is now looking for new forms of partnership, such as those structured around specific issues. This can be helpful for Plan in scaling up its programme coverage, as well as for successful advocacy work at national level.

The collaboration of parents, children, schools and the community can, step by step, help children to realise their rights and achieve gender equality in Asia.

Although the first 2005 deadline for the

Figure 20: Education interventions recommended by Plan

- Provision of separate and private latrines for girls, and a safe supply of water at school
- Support for sex-segregated schools where necessary
- Guidance and financial support for the construction of girl-friendly schools
- Training, recruitment and employment of more female teachers, particularly at the upper primary and secondary level
- Assistance in the construction of secondary schools near more villages
- Home-based early childhood care opportunities, and if possible, one pre-school per village
- Livelihood projects to support poor families in sending both girls and boys to school
- Special educational interventions for ethnic minority, low-caste, rural, and otherwise vulnerable children
- Non-formal education for children who cannot be mainstreamed into the formal education system
- Gender sensitisation of teachers, school managers, parent teacher associations, village development committees and other community-based organisations
- Life skills and vocational courses for adolescents that are tailored to local needs

third Millennium Development Goal of gender equality in primary and secondary education has already passed, the second 2015 deadline for gender parity at all education levels and the empowerment of women can in principle be met.

A concurrent goal for Education for All is not only to achieve gender parity by 2015, but also to achieve quality in basic education for all by the same date. Only by accelerating the pace of our collective actions can the 2015 deadlines be achieved.

Girls must have greater, easier access to education. Educated girls are more likely to acquire a sustainable livelihood that propels them and their families beyond the dollar-a-day income level that traps millions in extreme poverty. Schools protect girls from trafficking, from child labour and sexual exploitation. Schools teach them how to summon up the voices that have been silenced during centuries of gender discrimination. Education gives girls their voice.



Notes

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Annex 1.

Gender scan matrix of education programmes in Plan Asia

How gender sensitive is your education programme?	Score					List specific activities that your programme provides to substantiate ranking
	1 Very low	2 Low	3 Average	4 High	5 Very high	
At the family level						
Our education programme addresses socio-economic issues that affect girls' education						1. 2. 3. etc.
It aims at changes in attitude and behaviour of family members in favour of girls' education						
At the community level						
It aims at changes in attitude and behaviour of the community in favour of girls' education						
It aims at reinforcing positive practices and minimising negative practices that affect girls' education						
It promotes other stakeholders (such as CBOs, local associations...) to take initiatives in favour of girls' education						

At the school level	1 Very low	2 Low	3 Average	4 High	5 Very high	
It raises awareness of teachers and school personnel on issues relating to girls' education						
It provides opportunities for all girls in the community to go to school						
It provides opportunities for all girls to attend school regularly						
It provides opportunities for all girls to achieve their potential in all subjects						
It supports activities that contribute to doing away with stereotypical perceptions about girls						
It provides a safe physical environment where girls can study without fear						
It provides girls with the same opportunities as boys to learn in the classroom						
It provides girls with the same opportunities as boys for extra-curricular activities						

It actively seeks the views of female students and teachers on their experiences of education and their opinions on how it can be improved						
It provides adolescent girls (including those out-of-school) with the necessary life skills, career guidance and counselling						
At the education system level (national and/or provincial authorities)	1 Very low	2 Low	3 Average	4 High	5 Very high	
Our education programme contributes to influencing national/ provincial government's policy in favour of girls' education, namely: 1.#Supports recruitment of female teachers 2.#Supports making education materials and curriculum gender-sensitive 3.#Supports the adoption of laws and policies that are gender sensitive 4.#Advocacy for the enforcement of the rules of law (e.g., punishment for abuses against female students and teachers)						

Annex 2.

Focus group discussion questions for Plan's 2006 gender scan

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted at the family, school, community and district levels. It was Plan's first gender audit conducted with stakeholders at these levels. Questions 1 and 2 were used in FGDs in some countries to establish a common understanding of gender among participants. Questions 3 to 9 comprise the core questions common to the FGDs in all countries.

1. How do you understand gender equality (or equality between men and women, or boys and girls)?
2. What behaviours, attitudes and actions are considered gender inequality (inequality between men and women)?
3. What is the level of gender inequality that exists from the point of view of different stakeholders (parents, mothers, teachers, children, community members, education authorities, etc.)?
4. Do you know any examples of gender inequality? What can be accepted and what cannot be accepted?
5. What interventions have been most effective in addressing gender inequality (regardless of whether or not such interventions have been supported by Plan)?
6. What are the key stumbling blocks to gender equality in your country/ community/ school?
7. What should be the role of Plan in clearing those stumbling blocks?
8. In addition to what Plan has done so far, what are other activities/ interventions that are needed in order to address gender inequality in education?
9. In what way can Plan be most effective in advocating with government on the issue of gender equality?

Annex 3.

Plan Asia's School Improvement Programme (The Octagon Framework)

Plan International has been working to support child centred community development in Asia for many years. We promote, strengthen and protect child rights while ensuring that children play an active role in developing their future and that of their communities. Such approaches characterise our education programme, which has a sharp focus on gender equality. Learning from the lessons of the past, we have developed a strategy to ensure that our interventions are integrated and bring about meaningful changes in education and the lives of children.

This strategy is called the School Improvement Programme (SIP). SIP is a comprehensive strategy aimed at improving the accountability, efficiency, quality and child-friendliness of the schools that Plan supports in developing countries across Asia. It brings children and parents to the forefront in making meaningful changes that affect children's enrolment, retention and completion of basic education.

The aims of the SIP strategy are as follows:

- To support the initiatives of governments in achieving the goal of Education for All by 2015
- To support school-specific plans to improve their accountability and effectiveness in ensuring that all children attend school regularly, learn effectively and acquire basic reading, writing and numeracy skills
- To achieve gender equality and eliminate discrimination on the basis of class, caste and ethnicity
- To promote the participation of children and parents in the development, implementation and monitoring of school improvement plans.

Under the SIP strategy, Plan focuses its efforts on supporting improvement in eight key areas that have significant influence on children's enrolment, attendance and learning outcomes. This is why it is often called **The Octagon Framework**. (See diagram below.) The eight key areas are as follows:

1. Having competent and motivated teachers. Teachers are at the heart of education. Without competent and motivated teachers, students are not interested in attending school, cannot have good learning outcomes and quickly drop out. Plan supports national and local governments in their efforts to recruit and retain competent and motivated teachers. Such support includes capacity building of teachers in subject matter teaching, methodology, knowledge of child rights and financing of additional teachers to ensure the smooth running of schools.



2. Making the learning process effective for children. Having sufficient and competent teachers is crucial. At the same time, experience has shown that children cannot learn effectively unless the teaching process is child-friendly and participatory. Plan supports the introduction and use of child-centred learning methods, and the provision of appropriate teaching and learning aids. These efforts are accompanied by teacher training in the use of such methods, the exchange of experience among the teachers and the introduction of multi-grade teaching techniques.

3. Mobilising the participation of children and parents. Plan actively seeks the views and participation of children and their parents as being essential for school improvement. We involve parents and children in school affairs through children’s clubs, parent teacher associations and school management committees, while at the same time, strengthening the capacity of school administrators in school management. Among the most popular activities for children are using media, acting as news reporters and participating in advocacy events.

4. Ensuring that the school environment is safe, sound and conducive to learning.

Plan promotes a safe, sound and effective learning environment for all children. This includes financial support for improved school physical facilities to make them child-friendly and gender-appropriate, such as provision of latrines and water supply, construction or rehabilitation of classrooms, provision of furniture, and construction of teacher and student dormitory where this is necessary. Plan also supports teachers' and students' efforts in making the classroom arrangement and atmosphere conducive to learning, and advocates the use of positive discipline and prevention of violence against children, particularly girls.

5. Making curriculum relevant. A relevant curriculum enables children to make the best use of the schooling they receive, and in turn helps encourage parents to send their children, especially girls, to school. Plan supports efforts – both national and local – to make the curriculum gender-sensitive and relevant to the local context. This includes providing financial and pedagogical support to teachers in incorporating local and gender-sensitive knowledge into lessons, and supporting children's extra-curricular activities that can enrich their classroom learning. Plan-supported schools actively mobilise local knowledge and wisdom and use local people as resource persons.

6. Enhancing student preparedness. When children have a good developmental foundation, they do well and stay longer in school. Plan believes that interventions in education-only areas are not sufficient in improving children's learning outcomes. An unhealthy, malnourished child cannot learn effectively. Plan therefore provides financial and methodological support for early child care and development, both in centre- and home-based contexts. Such support provides children from 0 to 6 years old with good care and the early stimulation necessary to ensure success in primary school. At the same time, pregnant mothers and parents receive information on effective parenting that combines positive traditional practices with an understanding of the rights of children as individuals. Plan also encourages parents, through sensitisation and livelihood interventions, to give their children the support they need for success in school. Scholarships and school supplies are given to those children at risk of postponed entry, dropping out or not enrolling at all.

7. Improving school governance. The empowerment and support of school managers is crucial for the success of school improvement efforts. Regardless of national education policies, many decisions taken at the school level and local practices determine whether a school is effective, and if children attend school regularly and acquire basic knowledge. Plan provides support to strengthen the

capacity of school managers in various aspects of school management, and facilitates the participation of parents and children in school activities, including the development of a school improvement plan.

8. Mobilising government support. Plan is mindful that schools are a part of the national education system and that governments are the primary service provider. Plan sets out to support governments in their efforts rather than to substitute for them. Through advocacy and support in training and facilities, Plan helps provincial and district education offices provide supportive supervision to schools, and advocates for adequate government budget allocation.

Each of the eight areas is important. If any proves weak, the strength and success of the whole is affected. Plan Asia calls on its country offices to incorporate gender considerations in the interventions in these eight areas to foster gender equality, both as an organisation and through our community programmes.



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