Education in Emergencies Learning Community: Understanding the challenges to secure women and girls’ education.

On 24 March 2022, GCE hosted an Education in Emergencies learning community session to ‘Understanding the challenges to secure women and girls’ education’ and to engage GCE members, partners and other stakeholders around the multiple forms of exclusion, discrimination and violence that affect women and girls’ education. The EiE Learning Community shared knowledge and evidence from the Afghan Women Network (AWN), the Civil Society Action Coalition on Education For All (CSACEFA), Nigeria; and the Somali Coalition for Education.

The presentation from Afghanistan explored the challenges for girls and women education after the Taliban takeover. In Nigeria, the Nigerian National policy on Education states that “access to education is a right for all Nigerian children regardless of gender, religion and disability, which is in line with the Constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria. Despite this and other policies and programs in place, women and girls are still at a disadvantage, when it comes to accessing Universal Basic Education. This presentation focused on the analysis of the challenges and barriers inhibiting women and girls access to basic education. It also explored the role that the Civil Society Action Coalition on Education For All (CSACEFA) has played over the years in ensuring these challenges are removed and will suggest possible ways to ensure women and girls have access to education. In Somalia, the presentation by EFASOM explored the fact that the literacy rates are among the lowest in the world. Girls’ access to secondary and higher education is especially low, and reflects the existence of gender norms that are biased against women. As a result, women’s participation in the labour force is only 19%, which is also amongst the lowest in the world. There are traditional social norms that favour the educational attainment of boys over that of girls. In higher education, women represent only 30 percent of all students enrolled.

Learnings

Despite the progress in the design and implementation of policies to achieve gender parity in education in recent years, women and girls still face multiple forms of disadvantage to effectively enjoy their right to education. According to UNESCO, “more girls than boys remain out of school - 16 million girls will never set foot in a classroom, and women account for two-thirds of the 750 million adults without basic literacy skills”.

Against this background, this session of the EiE Learning Community aimed to better understand the multiple challenges faced by women and girls to enjoy their right to education. In doing so, evidence from three different contexts of emergencies was discussed, including Afghanistan, Nigeria and Somalia. This is in line with “Protect education in...”
emergencies now!” campaign led by the GCE, which aims to provide a way to urgently address the need for transformative, inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all in emergency contexts especially children and young people.

In Afghanistan, the opportunities for women to enjoy the right to education have been critical for decades. Now, the situation is even more complex due to the takeover of the Taliban. As seen in recent news, it was expected that girls and women would be returning to school, but the Taliban had changed their mind at the very last moment, and the fate of a million girls just waiting for the opportunity to go back to school is unclear.

In Nigeria, illegal arms groups have been a barrier to the right to education. Just recently, in 2014, over 250 girls were kidnapped from a public school and held hostage for several months. The threats against them prevail in this context.

In terms of Somalia, we are also very aware of the critical challenges in the context due to the ongoing conflict between radical groups. Somalian citizens have been suffering from the army and the costs and weapons of war, gender-based violence against women and protracted displacement. As a result of the conflict, schools have been closed, therefore showing several issues surrounding the realisation of the right to education that need to be addressed.

More broadly, today, more than 10 million people have been compelled to move from and leave their homes in the context of Ukraine, over 3.5 of them moving across borders, and the possibility for the people and children of Ukraine to enjoy the right to education is uncertain.

The world today is facing critical challenges in all corners of the world. And, of course, men's and women's rights to education are affected. However, in most contexts, female students face considerably more challenges. According to UNESCO reporting, more girls, and boys, remain out of school, 16 million girls will never set foot in a classroom, and women account for two-thirds of their 750 million adults without basic literacy skills.

Therefore, the event explored this significant issue not only in these three countries but in every corner of the world, inequalities, exclusion, discrimination and particular forms of violence against women that are deterring them from joining school, and enjoying the right to education.

The Case of Afghanistan

The presentation on Afghanistan explored the learning & educational challenges that girls and women face after the collapse of the republic government and enforcement of the power and will of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is one of the few countries where women don’t have the right to share their ideas, to participate in politics, to act and work freely, and to engage in other activities is Afghanistan. The biggest challenge that has led to limitation of women’s access is lack of education and literacy. During the past twenty years, the international community did a lot of praise-worthy activities in Afghanistan, but after a secret agreement, the world left Afghan people completely alone and led their hopes to be prisoner of a single group.

The situation in Afghanistan has completely changed and worsened after the Taliban took control and especially the women and girls are worried about the future.

Changes in the situation of women and girls’ education since the Taliban took control.
  - School doors are closed for girls
The whole academic field is overshadowed by a military lens
Women are not allowed to attend their jobs
Women are not allowed to travel, except with their Mahrams (specified males who accompany women)
Women don’t have the right to engage in civic activities or object to current situation
in some cases, young under-age girls were offered for sale, so that their families can escape hunger
Just a few days ago, a baby girl is born to a family, and she was shot to dead, just because she was a girl
Enforcing family pressures on women and not preventing it
All the above situation is caused by lack of education

Women, girls, and their families’ reactions to the situation:
Women are girls are attending public and private learning centers, despite limitations being enforced
Due to the prevailing poverty in most of the families, girls are not able to pursue their education
Girls are worried about their academic future
Some of the families still embrace the hardships and support their girls to access education
Given the situation inside the country is of military, educated girls and women are facing house-imprisonment
Distrust towards the Taliban is increasing day by day, because the follow some mysterious goals when it comes to women which harm the education of women and girls
Writing academic articles on the importance of education and freedom of women and girls, by girls in recognition of 8th March
Conducting civic protests by girls in response to girl’s education and imprisonment of protesters by authorities of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan
Despite all the limitations enforced by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, women and girls still dare to go to cities and roads and procure their primary needs

Actions taken by international organizations in response to the prevailing crisis
No serious and practical action has been taken yet, only some advocating has been done outside the country regarding the opening of school and university doors for girl students.
There is no specific organization that supports girls and women access to education.
Overall, the reaction of international organization to the current situation is not satisfactory and the main challenges of women and girls are yet to be addressed.

Priority actions in the field of education
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Solutions
The international community and humanitarian organizations need to pay more attention to the ongoing situation in Afghanistan to avoid a worsened humanitarian crisis.
The international community must provide political, economic, and cultural support with respect to women and girls’ education.
The doors of schools and universities must be opened to girls and women, without any excuses or delays.
The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan needs to include women in the government and respect their rights.
Knowledge and education is a necessity for both men and women and is considered an important requirement, so the women shouldn’t be denied of their human right.
Women need to be allowed to work in different sectors of the country (political, economic, cultural, and etc.)
Despite the difficult situation in Afghanistan, girls still strive to go to school.

Nigeria: Civil Society Action Coalition on Education For All (CSACEFA)

“Education is a fundamental human right and a necessary pathway to ending extreme poverty. Equitable, quality education has an immense power to transform the lives of not only individuals, but also families, communities, and nations.”

GCE national coalitions Civil Society Action Coalition on Education For All (CSACEFA) presented on the situation of women and girls in the Nigerian Context.

Nigeria Ecosystem

- Nigeria has a population of over 200 million people. Despite the abundance of mineral and Natural deposit, multiple Nigerians still leave below 1 dollar a day. Most Nigerians are surviving on subsistence living. There is also the absence of the Middle Class; the country is characterized by the gap between the poor and rich.
- 6 Geo-political zone
- 36 states
- 774 local government
- 250 ethnic groups and diverse languages
- 3 major languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba)

The current education system in Nigeria

- Currently, there is a federal government system in Nigeria: Both the federal and central governments legislate on education.
- Federal Unity schools are schools managed by the federal government: The funding from junior to secondary school is done by the federal government then basic secondary education is the state's responsibility.
- Basic and Secondary Education are the responsibility of state and Local government.

The bulk of the responsibility for education for girls is at the hands of the state.

Policies

Education is a basic human right, so the federal government has put in place several policies to ensure this right is on the path to realisation. Nigeria has successfully developed policies in all the education sectors in the country. These policies are developed to respond to international best practices to a very large extent.

- National Policy on Education (2014): It was most recently revised and approved in 2014. Thus policy holistically discusses who should enjoy education (every child, human being in Nigeria is entitled to learning).
- Universal Basic Education (2004): Speaks to the provision of free education for 9 years of basic education. For the first 9 years, every girl has the right to free, quality basic education in Nigeria.
• **National Policy on Gender in Education (2021):** This policy makes education gender-inclusive and particularly targets ensuring girls and women have access to education. This policy has been approved and signed by the Nigerian government.

• **Child Right Acts (2005):** This act speaks to the role of every parent and ensures women and girls have access to education.

*As seen through the policies, Nigeria recognises that women and girls have the right to education, yet there are still challenges to realising this.*

### Women and Girls education in Nigeria

*Educated women are empowered to take a greater economic role in their families and communities, and they tend to reinvest 90% of what they earn into their families. Investing in girls’ education also helps delay early marriage and parenthood.*

Despite this background, the situation shows that:

- Studies by UNICEF and the Nigerian government showed that 62% of there are about 10.2 million out of school children in Nigeria as of 2019, 62% of these are girls.
- It is estimated that 2 in three girls who are out of school may never return to school or experience education.
- The government announced a reduction of out-of-school children to 6.9 million in 2022 (dropped from 10.2 million), which is still being verified.
- Recent findings indicated that more boys are now out of school in Nigeria (educeleb.com).

### Challenges of women and girls education in Nigeria

To ensure equal access to education, the National Policy on Education states that access to education is a right for all Nigerian children regardless of gender, religion and disability.

Today's biggest challenge is not to do with policy provisions catering for girls; these exist. However, the bigger challenges are the barriers explored below:

- **Cultural and Religious misconceptions:** Some traditions believe women and girls don’t require “Western” education. The belief is that the education received from their parents is enough; this includes education elites themselves.
- **Early Child Marriage:** In most cases, parents hide under the guise of poverty to not send the child to school and instead send them to get married.
- **Poverty:** There are multiple hidden challenges in the education system despite the availability of free education for the first 9 years. Parents withdraw their children from school due to high costs, and girls bear the brunt of these withdrawals.
- **Value for girls’ education:** Most communities don’t take the value of a girl’s education seriously. “When women go to school, they tend to know too much, challenging leaders.”
- **Gender roles of girls and women/Domestic chores:** Girls often go to school late, and the reasons uncovered are that they must perform household chores before attending school and most times afterwards. When a new baby is born, girls tend to them, cook and wash clothes. Because of the prevailing fatigue from chores, girls also lose interest in education.
- **Issues of implementation of the Universal Basic Education Act and other policies:** The provisions of free basic education are not all implemented. For example, there is a provision that if any parent fails to send children to school, they should be arrested and prosecuted, but this has not been implemented, affecting girls’ education.
- **Gender Blind Programs and Budgets:** Programs of education are concentrated on boys. Further, very little finance is put into education. The budget has fluctuated between 5-7% for over 5 years now. The implementation at the state level which is supposed to be sole responsibility of the state governments, is not investigated very well.
• **Poor facilities/ infrastructures in Schools (WASH etc):** Girls often don’t have access to WASH facilities. Some schools don’t have facilities for basic WASH needs. Some girls don’t go to school during their periods than begin to lose interest.

• **Security (bandit, kidnapping, SRGBV):** For over 3 years, over 1400 students have been kidnapped. Most are usually girls; more than 800 girls have been kidnapped. Boko Haram is an issue but so are bandits. Gender based violence and harassment in school is also on the increase, particularly on the way to school. Teacher violence also exists and so does bullying, and this affects girls.

• **Pandemic/ epidemics (Covid):** Over 15 million children were out of school during Covid-19 and half may never return to school.

• **Conflicts and war in the Northeast:** Most girls are taken off for marriage and the conflict is a reason to send them away for marriage rather than going to school.

**CSACEFA Role**

- Engaging with Community on sensitization and enrolment drive,
- Advocacy and policy inputs and engagement relevant government at all levels,
- Monitoring the implementation of Education projects plans and policies,
- Campaigns: and education on the right of women to education,
- Mobilizing CSOs and groups to advocate for improved women education,
- Build the capacity of CSOs on advocacies, campaigns, communication and advocacy,
- Increase the voices of women and girls to education by providing platforms for engagement.

**Somalia: Somali Coalition for Education For All (EFASOM)**

Presented by EFASOM, was the perspective in Somalia on women and girls’ education and some of the barriers that have caused low literacy rates in the country.

- Challenges confronting girls’ and women’s education directly resulted from protracted emergencies stemming from conflict, drought, and flooding over the past two decades. The multi-pronged emergencies have had a significant impact on education systems, including lack of access and widespread inequity.
- An estimated 7.7 million people in Somalia, including 5 million children, will need humanitarian assistance in 2022.
- Almost 2.9 million people have been displaced in Somalia, where 574,000 people were forced out of their homes in 2021, living in more than 2,400 displacement sites.
- In general, girls and women in Somalia face considerable cultural challenges and economic challenges that prevent equal participation in society

**Challenges for girls’ education in Somalia**

- **Financial Barriers:** Most education schools were privately owned and operated by the private sector and NGOs, most of which charge fees. Most parents and caregivers cannot afford this. There are additional costs such as transportation, textbooks, and stationery. Therefore, most people choose to send their sons to school given that there are not enough financial resources to pay for all family members.

- **Cultural Barriers:** Cultural norms favour boys and severely restrict girls’ education. Particularly pastoralists and those living in rural areas are most reluctant to send girls to school. Girls are less likely to complete secondary education and have lifelong consequences on their social, economic, and political participation. Girls drop out of secondary schools because of discriminatory cultural norms such as early marriage and the demand for girls’ involvement in household work. 45 percent of women aged 20-24 married by the age of 18. There is also female genital mutilation. An estimated 91 percent of women aged 15-19 have undergone it causing the disparity in education.
• **Lack of female role models:** There is a lack of female role models within education. 5 percent of the total teachers recruited are female teachers. Low recruitment levels and limited career progression of female teachers and lecturers.

• **General Insecurity:** Somalia has extremely high rates of internal displacement because of conflict, droughts, cases of rape, violence against women, and early marriage. Insecurity prevents some girls from going to school or universities at night as afraid of being subjected to violence. GBV is pervasively dominated by physical assault.

**Challenges for women in education in Somalia**

- **Limited access to adult education:** There is perpetually low literacy rates amongst adult and elderly women in Somalia. The illiterate adults, particularly women struggle to find a voice in their communities, paving the way for gender discrimination.

- **Limited access to skill development classes:** There is limited access to skills-training. Female-headed households are in particularly vulnerable in this opportunity. Women have unequal access to agriculture, livestock and fisheries production inputs and technology.

**How EFASOM is promoting girls’ education in Somalia.**

- Conducts education campaigns and forums to support women and girls’ education.
- Influence the public perception on girls’ education.
- Works with the Somali government to lobby for policies for girls’ education.

*EFASOM: A group of women who returned to school with the help of EFASOM Somalia after early marriage earlier in their lives.*