



Gender Equality
and Education

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VSO's position on gender equality

For VSO, gender equality means that men and women have equal opportunities to realise their individual potential – both to contribute to their country's economic and social development and to benefit equally from their participation in society. Gender inequality is based on gender biases and stereotypes in a particular society. Even though gender equality refers to male and female concerns, the majority of gender imbalances in the developing world show a heavy bias against women. These biases and stereotypes can also create problems for men, and create vulnerabilities for certain groups of people whose behaviours, identities and/or bodies do not fit the norm. They also constrain men and women from working effectively together for the development of their society. In practical terms, this means a **lower quality of life** for women (e.g. more hours worked/less leisure, fewer educational opportunities, more violence, rape, less political representation,) and **less income** (e.g. less access to land or credit, lower pay in the formal sector).

VSO recognises that gender biases and stereotypes are a significant factor in the perpetuation of poverty, that they are socially acquired and not biologically determined; therefore they can and should be challenged. VSO is committed to the achievement of gender equality and the promotion of the human rights, which we believe is essential for sustainable development and social and economic justice.

VSO also recognises that achieving gender equality means going further than improving female health and education. It means, among other things, that women and men from all walks of life should be free to make their own choices, have access to decision making bodies and positions, the capability to exploit economic resources, and the opportunity to participate in society and politics.

Gender equality and education

Millennium Development Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Target 2A: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

Girls' education has been a high priority for low income countries throughout the first decade of the 21st century. A wide range of interventions - such as scholarships, stipends, conditional cash transfers, gender segregated toilets, recruitment and training of more female teachers - have all made a positive contribution towards increasing the enrolment of girls into primary education.

UN and civil society research has consistently argued that investment in girls' education has significant benefits for girls, women, their families, wider communities and societies:

- **An extra year of primary school boosts girls' eventual wages by 10-20 per cent and an extra year of secondary school by 15-25 per cent¹.**
- **When women and girls earn income, they reinvest 90 per cent into their families, as compared to only 30-40 per cent for a man².**
- **A girl in Africa who receives an education is three times less likely to contract HIV and AIDS³.**
- **Education gives girls the confidence to marry later, and gives women greater influence in household decisions. Educated women tend to have smaller families, their children are better nourished, more likely to survive and are far more likely to do well at school themselves⁴.**
- **Education also encourages active citizenship by giving girls and boys the knowledge to influence the direction of society and to engage in politics and democracy as adults⁵.**

These examples illustrate how education generates cumulative social benefits for people, particularly girls and women. However, there are disparities in access to, and the quality of education enjoyed by learners and in learning outcomes among populations and groups due to social, economic and cultural factors. Sixty nine million primary school-aged children still do not attend school. In the majority of low income countries girls have less access to education than boys at all levels of education. Of the 759 million adults lacking literacy skills today, two-thirds are women, a statistic that reflects the depth of gender disparity in access to education⁶. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, almost 12 million girls who are not attending school are expected never to enrol while the number for boys is seven million⁷. According to UNESCO about half of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa that have a Gender Parity Index (GPI) for primary enrolment in 2007 showed gender disparities favouring boys. Several countries in fact had a GPI below 0.85 (i.e. there were only 85 girls in enrolled for every 100 boys) – including Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Mali, Niger and Somalia⁸.

It should be noted that gender inequality in education is not always about low enrolment and completion rates of girls. In a small number of low income countries, girls enrolment and completion outstrips that of boys. This may happen where demand for boys' labour is higher. For example, poor rural families in Mongolia - particularly those in highland areas - often rely on boys to herd cattle, with the result that dropout rates are higher for boys than girls⁹. For similar reasons, boys in Bangladesh are reportedly dropping out of school in much larger numbers than girls, a phenomenon that is reported as being the country's biggest gender challenge. Girls in Bangladesh now account for 60 per cent of enrolments in some schools, especially in rural areas¹⁰.

While fewer women than men have advanced to tertiary education in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, there are more women than men enrolled in tertiary education worldwide. Girls are much more likely to proceed to tertiary education in the Commonwealth of Independent States (former Soviet republics), Latin America and the Caribbean, and South-East Asia. In developed regions there is now a reverse gender gap in tertiary education: 129 females to 100 males¹¹.

The above examples indicate that context specific gender policy interventions are required to address gender inequality in education. Gender equality policies should include not only enrolment targets but also equal access to quality education and chances for completion of education at each level of the education system.

¹ *Returns to Investment in Education: A Further Update. Policy Research Working Paper 2881, 2002, World Bank*

² *Women's Rights Vital for Developing World, 2003, Yale Daily News*

³ *Back to School? The Worst Places in the World to be a School Child in 2010, 2010, Global Campaign for Education*

⁴ *A Fair Chance: Attaining gender equality in basic education by 2005, 2003, Global Campaign for Education*

⁵ *Gender and Education For All: The Leap to Equality. EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2004, UNESCO*

⁶ *Reaching the Marginalized. EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010, UNESCO*

⁷ *Reaching the Marginalized: Gender Overview Paper for Beijing +15 Consultation, 2010, UNESCO*

⁸ *Sex-Disaggregated Data: a Brief Analysis of Key Education and Science Indicators Since the Beijing Declaration and Platform For Action (1995), 2010, UNESCO Institute of Statistics*

⁹ *The Mongolian Drop Out Study, 2005, Mongolian Education Alliance*

¹⁰ *Girls' Education in the 21st Century. Gender Equality, Empowerment and Economic Growth, 2008, World Bank*

¹¹ *Thematic Paper on MDG 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women, 2010, UNIFEM*

Obstacles to gender equality in education

Underlying causes of gender inequality in education are diverse and interconnected; however, the following are common causes that we have identified in countries where VSO works in education. These causes can be broadly grouped into **community level obstacles** (those external to the school/education system environment) and **school and education system level obstacles** (those internal to the school/education system environment).

Community level obstacles

Poverty and child labour

One of the strongest and most influential factors contributing to educational marginalisation is household poverty as nearly 1.4 billion people live on less than US\$1.25 a day¹². Clearly, income poverty when combined with low educational participation creates a cycle of exclusion from other rights such as access to health care, justice, a livelihood and political participation.

Girls from excluded groups, such as children with disabilities or children from linguistic minorities, often encounter even greater obstacles in schools and classrooms – if their different learning needs or not considered, if classrooms are not accessible, or if lessons are delivered in a language they don't understand. Poorer parents are also more likely to withhold their children (girls or boys, depending on the country context) from education so that they can work and contribute to household income or help with domestic tasks. In Nigeria, for instance, 97 per cent of poor Hausa-speaking girls have fewer than two years of education¹³. The Commonwealth Secretariat has argued in a 2008 report that, for example, in some Islamic states, poor parents especially, view formal education with suspicion and may believe it to be irrelevant for girls. The report argues that the lack of educational infrastructure (schools that admit girls, or the lack of basic facilities such as gender segregated toilets) in such countries tends to exacerbate such beliefs¹⁴.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO)'s most recent estimate¹⁵ suggests that there are still 215 million children involved in child labour, violating the internationally agreed human rights standards laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child¹⁶. The ILO reports that, if not all, the majority children worldwide missing out on primary education are child labourers¹⁷. Governments will clearly need to accelerate their efforts to eliminate child labour since the two things are inextricably linked.

“Education is a key element in the prevention of child labour, while child labour is one of the main obstacles to Education For All. Children who need to work full time cannot go to school”¹⁸

In most low income countries girls have to work to support their families financially (especially those from single-parent families) and have increased responsibility for domestic chores in the home. Poverty has a greater impact on girls than on boys since families from poorer rural backgrounds tend to prioritise their sons over their daughters' education. The nature of gender related educational participation is of course highly context specific. Whether boys or girls are underachieving in education in any particular country, region or community, will depend on the prevailing concepts of masculinity and femininity, and on whether the society or community is predominantly patriarchal or matriarchal. Case studies from Jamaica, Samoa and Lesotho collected by the Commonwealth Secretariat¹⁹, highlight examples of different gender norms which lead to underachievement among boys compared to girls. Anecdotal evidence from VSO's own programme experience from Guyana, Mongolia and The Philippines reminds us that we have to be careful to avoid global generalisations when talking about gender inequality in education systems.

¹² Thematic papers on the Millennium Development Goals, 2010, United Nations Development Group

¹³ Reaching the Marginalized. EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010, UNESCO

¹⁴ Islam and the Education of Women and Girls in the Commonwealth, 2008, Commonwealth Secretariat and Council for Education in the Commonwealth

¹⁵ Accelerating action against child labour: Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work 2010, 2010, International Labour Organisation

¹⁶ Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

¹⁷ Millennium Development Goals: review of progress 2010: MDG 2. Achieve universal primary education Information Brief, 2010, International Labour Office

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Boys' Underachievement in Education: an Exploration in Selected Commonwealth Countries, 2006, Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth of Learning

The impact of poverty on girls' education cambodia

In Cambodia many children, especially girls, are required to work in order to supplement the meagre incomes of poor families. An estimated 52 per cent of 7 to 14 year-olds (over 1.4 million children in absolute terms) in Cambodia are economically active²⁰. To these children and their families living in extreme poverty, an education, with its long-term returns, has little economic value as long as there are greater, more immediate monetary gains from each member contributing to the family earnings at as early an age as possible.

“It is not a lack of understanding of the value of education but the realistic understanding of the present job situation that influences parents to make the choice to keep their children at home. Many parents believe that children should attend school up to Grade 3 to acquire sufficient knowledge for ‘reading things at the market, medicine labels and their own children’s homework’ after which they would be better off learning relevant life skills at home and contributing to family income and thriving at locally available jobs”²¹

Education inequalities across income groups and gender are enormous. In countries where girls are the most disadvantaged in terms of participation in education, girls from the poorest households and rural areas, ethnic or linguistic minorities are even more disadvantaged. Such education differentials by income are intensified by gender inequality in low-income countries. For example: Cambodia, Ethiopia and Ghana all have laws and constitutions enshrining the right to free primary education and they have all introduced policies to eliminate user fees for primary education, which has resulted in increased enrolment. However, while formal charges were eliminated, informal costs have remained a barrier. A research report undertaken with the assistance of a VSO volunteer for the NGO Education Partnership in Cambodia in 2007²² found that parents were spending over US\$100 a year to send one child to school – which amounted to 8.7 per cent of reported annual family income. Despite formal fees being officially illegal, other costs associated with taking children to school included start up costs for school uniforms, study materials and school registration, daily costs for food and transport, occasional fees for lesson handouts and exam papers, and for class supplies, bike maintenance, gifts for teachers and ceremonies and optional fees for private tutoring. Despite the abolishment of formal school fees, many parents therefore continue to cite their inability to afford these informal costs as the reason their children; particularly girls and children with disabilities do not attend school.

Socio-cultural constraints

The effects of poverty are strongly conditioned by social attitudes, cultural and religious factors. In many societies, girls are expected to get married at an early age. For instance, in Tanzania, according to the Ministry of Education statistics, 28,600 girls left school between 2004 and 2008 because they became pregnant. At secondary level in 2007 one in five girls fell pregnant and did not finish school²³. Traditional and cultural beliefs in patriarchal communities or societies clearly reinforce gender biases and stereotypes that give preference to boys over girls in access to education and assert that girls should remain in the home. This prevents girls from attending, remaining and performing in school particularly at the upper primary and secondary levels when they take on more responsibilities including caring for younger siblings and older relations.

In 2008 VSO conducted a baseline report for DFID²⁴ and CIDA²⁵ reporting, on the capacity of our partners to promote gender equality and the quality of education experienced by girls across a total of nine developing countries²⁶. In one focus group in Ethiopia all but one girl had lost a parent or was caring for a sick family member and been forced to give up school in order to work. One girl said:

“My father is sick and bed bound. When I see my friends going to school in uniform, I do also like to go to school and I know how important education is for your future. But if I go to school, my mother could not work”²⁷

²⁰ Teaching in Cambodia, 2008, Human Development Sector East Asia and the Pacific Region The World Bank and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport Royal Government of Cambodia

²¹ Why Children drop out of Primary School, 2006, VSO Cambodia

²² *The Impact Of Informal School Fees On Family Expenditure*, 2007, NGO Education Partnership

²³ *Pregnant Teens Forced Out of School*, 2010, Inter Press Service

²⁴ The UK Government’s Department for International Development

²⁵ Canadian International Development Agency – Canada’s lead agency for development assistance

²⁶ Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guyana, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania and the Thai-Burma border programme

²⁷ *VSO Baseline Information Report*, 2008, VSO International (unpublished)

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *Liberating Girls from 'Trokosi': Campaign Against Ritual Servitude in Ghana*, 2001, UNIFEM

³⁰ *What is FGC?*, 2010, The Orchid Project

³¹ *Female genital mutilation Fact sheet N°241*, 2010, World Health Organisation

³² *Putting Children at the Centre of Education: How VSO supports practice and Policy in Primary Schools*, 2008, VSO Ethiopia

³³ *Why 60 Million Girls Still Aren't in School and What to do About it*, 2006, Centre for Global Development

Teachers in a focus group discussion in Ghana highlighted the vicious cycle many girls find themselves in, where time spent on domestic chores leads to low performance in school which in turn feeds into parents' low expectations of their daughters, often leading to drop-out. Teachers said that:

“Girls are made to do household chores, unlike boys. This takes away some time for studies on the part of the girl child and as a result her performance in school is below par and her grades are low. The parents see this as a loss in their investment with the hope that the girl should look after them later. The girl is therefore taken out of school”²⁸

In addition to girls' roles as caregivers and housekeepers, there are many other socio-cultural beliefs and practices which negatively impact on girls' education; for example, puberty rites and **Trokosi** (female ritual slavery) in Ghana, and female genital cutting (FGC) in many African countries. **Trokosi** is a practice prevalent in Ghana's Volta region in which girls accused of crimes or violations of social norms, are punished by being sent by their families into servitude as a form of penance. Girls are expected to serve local priest for three to five years, after which the family might redeem her. During this time, girls are forced to drop out of school. The practice reportedly results in repeated sexual abuse and unwanted pregnancies which make return to school even more difficult²⁹.

FGC is a culturally-entrenched puberty rite of passage that involves the cutting or removal of a girl's external genitals. Sometimes the hood of the clitoris is removed; in other cases the entire clitoris and labia are cut. 'Infibulation' is the most severe form, where the wound is sewn up leaving only a tiny opening, through which girls urinate and menstruate. The hard scar tissue that forms becomes a physical barrier to penetrative sex and to giving birth. On their wedding nights and just prior to labour, girls are cut open and are then re-sewn³⁰. The World Health Organisation estimates that between 100 and 140 million girls and women worldwide have been subjected to FGC³¹, with the practice being most prevalent in the western, eastern and north-eastern regions of Africa, and some countries in Asia and the Middle East. FGC is practiced often on girls as young as 12 or 13, who usually then drop out of school to marry and start a family.

Lack of parental involvement and community participation

Where cultural practices such as the above are prevalent, clearly there will be an impact on parents' perceptions of their daughters' abilities. Parents in countries where the dominant gender biases and stereotypes favour boys may perceive that girls have limited job opportunities in the formal sector, which they consider as the most important return on their investment in education. They may believe that boys often have greater aspirations and opportunities than girls. However, evidence from an external evaluation conducted by VSO Ethiopia suggests that girls often have just as high aspirations as boys and as solid an understanding about the opportunities open to them if they succeed in education. As one grade eight (upper primary school) girl, from Dawdo School, in Amhara, Ethiopia put it:

“I would like to become a lawyer to protect women from all kinds of abuse. We need to safeguard their rights”³²

Increased parental engagement in their children's education has been shown many times over to contribute significantly to children's learning. Parental involvement includes engaging parents and communities in the governance of schools as well as encouraging parents to create a supportive learning environment for their children at home in which they can study³³. Involving parents also helps assure them that their daughters are safe at school. However, lack of access to educational information at the community level, means that parents lack knowledge and understanding of school management structures. Furthermore, members of school management committees and of parent teacher associations are not clear about the roles they could play and how they could engage with relevant district structures and education authorities.

School and education system level obstacles

Lack of investment in quality education

VSO's experience from our programmes suggests that after abolishing user fees, increasing investments in other inputs to maintain and improve the quality of education is vital. As the example from Cambodia, on page four, shows, without simultaneous investment in teacher preparation, recruitment, sufficient remuneration and continuing professional development for teachers, and the provision of free school meals, transport, textbooks, teaching and learning materials, uniforms, and improved infrastructure, policies that abolish user fees will do little to improve the overall quality of education.

Parents, teachers and girls interviewed by VSO for our baseline report all agreed that basic inputs such as human and material resources, infrastructure and facilities and sufficient instructional time, are necessary for effective learning to take place³⁴. Low quality inputs to schools and perceptions of the irrelevance of school further reduce the willingness of parents to send their children to school³⁵.

Inappropriate attitudes, behaviours and skills of teachers

The quality of education delivery is strongly influenced by the attitude, behaviour and skills of teachers in the schools. Specifically gender sensitive and inclusive teaching has a direct impact on pupils' participation and performance in the classroom, particularly for girls in patriarchal societies (or equally for boys in matriarchal societies). In the absence of gender friendly teaching skills, teachers may not encourage and respect the participation and contribution of girls (or of boys, where boy underachievement is the main problem). Gender biases and stereotypes expressed by pupils, teachers, parents and community members and corresponding discriminatory practices are left unchallenged, thus reinforcing and reproducing gender inequalities. In most schools involved in VSO's baseline report, teachers were reported as being discriminatory towards girls. One focus group of girls in Ghana reported that:

“We [girls] are expected to behave in a culturally appropriate manner, to perform certain tasks that society assigns to us and be obedient. Our teachers often ask us to clean classrooms and offices, fetch water for the school and sometimes undertake tasks for teachers e.g. prepare food”³⁶

The research was found that teachers (both male and female) who had not had any gender sensitivity training and/or training on inclusive education often considered girls to be less intelligent than boys. Many head teachers, school directors, members of school management committees and parents also held this view. The reasons given for this perception were that girls' performance in the school was often lower than that of boys and that they did not participate actively in the classroom. Teachers reported that girls were often weak at English, Maths and Science compared to boys and also less regular in the class.

Although there was generally recognition of heavier work burdens on girls, teachers did not always link this factor with their poor performance. There was a strong tendency to blame the girls' background and lay the responsibility at the feet of the parents. Without training in gender sensitive and inclusive teaching and learning methodologies teachers had difficulty identifying strategies for supporting low achieving pupils.

Limited instructional time and teacher absenteeism was cited by girls who dropped out of school, as a contributory factor in their parents' decision for not continuing their education. However the many legitimate reasons for absenteeism such as personal illness (including HIV and AIDS); caring for sick relatives (especially true in countries with high HIV prevalence rates); attending funerals; undertaking training; and the requirement for teacher to assist in local government activities; and the extremely low salaries – which often require teachers to take on second jobs or engage in subsistence farming to survive and feed their families – should be acknowledged. VSO research in Pakistan, for example, has found that teacher absence – especially among female teachers – is worse in rural areas, where there is greater physical insecurity, harassment and poor sanitary facilities in schools, which significantly hamper the teachers' ability to perform effectively. Female teachers discussed transport difficulties and the fact of commuting from urban areas with unknown men in buses as reasons for absenteeism³⁷.

³⁴VSO Baseline Information Report, 2008, VSO International (unpublished)

³⁵VSO Baseline Information Report, 2008, VSO International (unpublished)

³⁶Teacher Professionalism in Punjab: Raising Teachers' Voices, 2005, VSO Pakistan

³⁷VSO Baseline Information Report, 2008, VSO International (unpublished)

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Teachers in Anglophone Africa. Issues in Teacher Supply, Training and Management*, 2009, World Bank

⁴⁰ *Gender and Education For All: The Leap to Equality. EFA Global Monitoring Report*, 2004, UNESCO

⁴¹ *Women's Education in Developing Countries: Barriers, Benefits and Policies*, 1993, World Bank

⁴² *No male teachers in quarter of primary schools*, 2010, The Telegraph

⁴³ *Is menstrual hygiene a management an issue for adolescent schoolgirls?* 2009, Water Aid

Lack of female or male teachers as role models

The lack of female teacher role-models was also highlighted (by community level stakeholders interviewed by VSO, in the countries involved in the baseline report) as being a key factor in hindering girls' experience of quality education³⁸. They told us that female teachers serve as role models for girls' participation in education. Their presence encourages parents to send their children to school, both because they see opportunities for their daughters outside the household and because of the increased sense of security for girls when female teachers are present. The girls interviewed for the report confirmed this view stating that they would be more comfortable to talk to a female teacher about the challenges they face when they reach puberty³⁹.

However the shortage or complete absence of female teachers in rural schools, in many countries, is alarming. For example, In Uganda and Zambia, the share of female teachers in urban primary schools is about 60 per cent, compared with 15 per cent to 35 per cent in rural areas⁴⁰. This gender imbalance in the teaching workforce has been proven to have negative consequences on the improvement of gender equality in schools. It also has a significant impact on the retention of girls in schools as girls are less likely to progress to higher levels of schooling if their personal needs for coaching and counseling are not met due to the absence of female teachers at lower secondary and secondary levels. Some parents are unwilling to send their girls to schools where they know there are only male teachers and that chances of sexual abuse and violence are higher.

However, according to UNESCO, girls' enrolments rises relative to boys' as the proportion of female teachers rises from low levels⁴¹. And the relationship between female teachers' presence and girls' attainment and achievement at school is important because well-trained female teachers can easily spot girls' that are at risk of dropping out prematurely and take steps to address the problem before it is too late⁴².

Conversely in some countries, a shortage of male primary teachers creates different problems for boys. For instance, almost three-in-10 primary schools in England are now staffed entirely by women. Male teachers make up just 12 per cent of the primary school workforce resulting in concerns that a lack of male role models may be putting boys off school at a young age and promoting the view that hard work is for girls. Girls currently outperform boys at the age of seven and pull ahead throughout primary and secondary school⁴³.

Evidently, whether the problem is lack of female role models for girls or lack of male role models for boys the remedy is to ensure that the teaching force becomes gender balanced and should not be dominated by either gender. This will require specific policy responses to encourage more women (or more men) to train as teachers. Some of these are outlined in the recommendations section of this policy briefing, but context specific solutions will evidently have to be determined based on the nature and extent of gender inequality in each country and on the challenges specific to urban, rural and remote areas, linguistic minorities, or migrant, refugee or other minority communities.

Lack of gender-friendly school environments

Head teachers and school directors we interviewed for our baseline report, reported the many challenges they were facing to establish even basic physical facilities such as safe drinking water, sufficient classrooms and furniture, and basic sanitary facilities – including separate toilets for girls and boys). And yet the strong correlation between girls reaching puberty and absenteeism from school, has been often been highlighted in the literature. A survey of adolescent school girls conducted by Water Aid in Nepal, for example, showed that about half of the respondents (53 per cent) had been absent from school at least once due to menstruation. Lack of privacy for cleaning and washing (41 per cent) was the major reason identified by survey respondents for being absent during menstruation. This is usually due to issues such as lack of running water or missing door locks, even when a working toilet is present⁴⁴.

The issue of insecurity for girls and female teachers on the way to school and in school – due to gender based violence, e.g. sexual abuse, forced prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation and trafficking was also raised in the discussions conducted during VSO's **Valuing Teachers** research⁴⁵, where female teachers reported concerns with regard to safety in housing particularly in rural areas. Sexual harassment at school level is a common issue reported by both female teachers and girls in the research. For example:

- In **Mozambique** one participant spoke of a boarding school where as many as 40 per cent of the girls who lived in the boarding house became pregnant, and of the authorities' lack of interest in solving what they did not regard as a problem, simply a cultural phenomenon. Research participants reported that teachers who are found guilty of rape or sexual harassment/abuse are generally transferred to another post, with no other sanction or legal action taken (such as dismissal or imprisonment)⁴⁶.
- In **The Gambia** teachers posted away from their families in isolated positions reported the added difficulty of dealing with sexual harassment and inappropriate conduct. Coupled with family duties and responsibilities, this makes remote postings an even more difficult for female teachers⁴⁷.
- In **Ethiopia** teachers highlighted that women and girls were the 'victims of harmful traditions', such as forced marriage, abduction, sexual assault and rape, while male students have been known to beat and insult female teachers and pupils⁴⁸.

Sexual harassment and improper sexual relations with girls by teachers was an issue for focus groups of girls in and out of school and for focus groups with parents in Ghana, Cameroon, Ethiopia and Namibia, conducted for the VSO baseline report⁴⁹. And of course sexual harassment is not confined to abuse of girls by male teachers. In Afghanistan, although a highly patriarchal society, because men are taught that women are unclean and are discouraged from even looking at women or girls, it is boys that are the subject of sexual harassment. The story hit the headlines in 2010 when the US State Department called it a "widespread, culturally sanctioned form of male rape"⁵⁰. Whilst there is little research available the extent of sexual harassment of boys by male teachers in Madrassas (koranic schools), internet reports imply that the practice is widespread in both Afghanistan and Pakistan⁵⁰.

⁴⁴ VSO has conducted research on teachers' motivation and morale in 14 countries

⁴⁵ *Listening to Teachers*, 2008, VSO Mozambique

⁴⁶ *Teachers Speak Out*, 2007, VSO The Gambia

⁴⁷ *How much is a good teacher worth? 2009*, VSO Ethiopia

⁴⁸ *VSO Baseline Information Report*, 2008, VSO International (unpublished)

⁴⁹ *Afghanistan's dirty little secret*, 2010, San Francisco Chronicle

⁵⁰ 'Mullahs Sexually Aggress or Rape their Young Students in the Madrassas, the Koranic Schools', 2006, Bruce Tefft

VSO's approach to gender equality in education

Promoting gender equality is one of VSO's development priorities in all its country programmes as a crosscutting theme. Supporting the provision of girls' education is a central focus in many of VSO's Education Programmes as in most of the countries where it is girls that are more excluded than boys. One of our key strategies for increasing our impact in education is to work through **multiple interventions at multiple levels of the education system**, from the school and local community to national level policy. We believe that if we really are going to improve the quality of education for girls and boys in any given school then we need a combination of interventions in overlapping strategic areas to achieve this quality. For example at district level in Ghana we have: volunteers training teachers to use gender-sensitive teaching strategies in the classroom; increased support for training, recruitment and deployment of females teachers; alongside sensitisation of parents on the value of education for their daughters. These interventions relate to our key areas of work in education on the ground: 'teaching and learning', 'education management' and 'community engagement' and are reinforced and showcased through our regional and national level policy and advocacy work in support of girls' education (see diagram below).



Addressing community level obstacles

VSO has many approaches to addressing **community level obstacles** to girls' education in partnership with government and non-government organisations; some examples are:

- **Building the capacity of Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs)** and Community Based Organisation (CBOs) to support their school communities more effectively through meaningful participation in school management and collaboration with local education authorities to address issues affecting the access and quality of education
- **Organising activities to sensitise parents on the value of education** for their children, both boys and girls, with a specific focus on inclusion and identification of the most excluded children in a particular community
- **Community and national level advocacy initiatives** to strengthen the capacity of civil society coalitions at district, provincial and national levels to undertake participatory advocacy research and use the evidence gathered to influence policy making and implementation at different levels of the system
- **Working to analyse and address socio-cultural barriers** by working with Parent Teachers Associations, School Management Committees, village chiefs, youth groups and other opinion leaders in communities to identify and find locally appropriate ways to dismantle obstacles that prevent girls and children with disabilities from going to and remaining in school
- **Linking parents of girls to income-generating opportunities** to increase their incomes to enable them maintain their girls in school
- **Providing support for adult literacy** in order to promote the importance of education and support for girls' schooling.

Improving girls' education in Northern Ghana and Cameroon

In both Ghana and Cameroon Parent Teacher Associations, School Councils and Mothers Groups have been collaborating with Education authorities to address some of the issues that affect girls' enrolment, retention and performance in school.

In **Cameroon**, VSO has built the capacity of 30 Mother Teacher Associations and 39 School Councils in the regions where girl's education has been identified as an issue. VSO has worked alongside UNICEF Cameroon as co-creators of the initiative with the full collaboration of the Government. VSO volunteers work directly with Schools Inspectors as supervisors of their activities in their respective schools and with RECAMEF, a VSO partner, which is the network of Mothers Teachers Associations (MTAs), to raise awareness about MTAs. VSO volunteers are placed in schools clusters as School Development Advisors. They work closely with school committees in pairs with national volunteers to facilitate capacity building of the committees as well as of individual members. As a result of activities such as adult literacy classes and gender sensitisation for parents, awareness raising of teachers on gender sensitive and inclusive classroom management through focus group discussions there have been the following outcomes:

- PTAs, MTAs and school committees have an increased understanding of their roles and responsibilities; this has led to a reactivation of school committees in 46 schools
- The school communities are more aware of the work of the committees which are working better and managing resources adequately through the use of accountable documents and procedures
- Collaboration between teachers and the community has improved with teachers engaging more often in awareness and fund raising activities to support the communities' involvement
- Collaboration amongst government representatives, local councils and school committees in 57 schools is progressing well with regular interaction and involvement in decision-making in school projects
- Parents' understanding of about the importance of and value education has increased dramatically
- In the far north of Cameroon the number of children enrolled in schools where VSO is building the capacity of PTAs has risen by almost 14 per cent (since the baseline was carried out in 2008), and the numbers of children out of school has dropped by nearly 20 per cent.

In **Ghana** the Nadowli Assembly Women's Advocacy Group (NAWAG), an elected group of District Assembly women, has been supported by VSO volunteers to work together more strategically, to source external funding, advocate and lobby the council to improve services that negatively impact on girls, for the past four years. While the assembly women were achieving successes as individuals they were doing little to support each other. So the Community Advocacy Volunteer worked with the women to help them understand how they could work together to support and advise each other and learn from their individual experiences to increase the group's impact and effectiveness. Some outcomes have been:

- The dormant Area Councils have been 'woken up'. School Management Committees and PTAs who are now working collectively to support girls' education. Alerting Head Teachers, Teachers, Circuit Supervisors, Girl Child Officers and the community to work together more effectively.
- More communities now appreciate women in leadership, and now more women in the community want to take up leadership roles.
- There is increased community cohesion and enthusiasm for addressing education issues. Men are now more willing to listen to and be led by women (this also strengthens husband-wife relationships and decision making in the home).
- Retention and safety of girls in school has improved as NAWAG has successfully lobbied for the provision of boreholes in Owillo community to enable girls to spend less time fetching water enabling them to improve their attendance at school.
- NAWAG also advocates for girls who are sexually abused and supports them to return to school.
- NAWAG has secured funding from Barclays, MTN (a mobile phone company) and support from local education and community stakeholders to develop and implement The GREAT Project (Girls Retention Enrolment and Transition Project). This Project will enable the Assembly women to address poor retention rates in school by providing the most deprived children with resources such as uniforms, books and bags, helping schools improve décor and resources and improving the availability of mentoring and school club activities.
- In Nadowli district in Ghana the number of children enrolled in schools in communities supported by NAWAG has risen from by 31.9 per cent (since the baseline was carried out in 2008), and the numbers of children out of school has dropped by 70.6 per cent.

Addressing school and education system level obstacles

Our approach to **school and education system level obstacles** is multi-faceted and looks at both issues affecting teaching and learning and education management at all levels of the education system, some examples are:

- **delivering training on gender friendly teaching material production and providing materials to increase girls' performance**
- **supporting government Continuing Professional Development initiatives to improve teacher skill, attitude and behaviour and provide in-service training programmes on gender related issues and gender perspectives in teaching for schoolteachers, gender- focal persons and supervisors**
- **strengthening girls and boys clubs to increase their knowledge on gender, sexuality, HIV and AIDS, career development skills to become more confident and assertive and providing them with small grants to improve school facilities, such as latrines (for girls and boys) and water**
- **training District and Regional gender officers to provide continued support to the teachers and head teachers, monitor reports and feedback on lessons to the national level**
- **strengthening gender mainstreaming in curricula and textbook revision and development**
- **increasing the number of teachers, particularly female teachers, at all levels of education, who are well trained and supported to provide quality education for girls and enrich their school experience through teacher training support and national level advocacy on teacher recruitment policies**
- **support the process of local, provincial and/or national policy formulation and implementation frameworks to be more gender sensitive.**

Improving academic performance for female student teachers Ethiopia

Significant changes have been observed in female students' enrolment at all levels of the education system in Ethiopia. Yet, the female attrition rate is still high especially when it comes to the tertiary levels of education. With the support of VSO, Haramaya University has tried to address the problem. The University established and strengthened a Gender Office so as to offer different services for female students in the University, for example:

- training for newly admitted female students on assertiveness and study skills
- establishment of a 'Gender Awareness, Leadership and Club Management for Girls' Union and Forum'
- training in gender sensitive leadership skills for female students and staff at the School of Graduate Studies
- provision of guidance and consultation services for all female students
- economic support for needy students
- tutorial support for newly-admitted female students as well as students with poor performance.

For students who have been dismissed as a result of poor academic performance, a pilot project was initiated by the Office of the Academic Vice President and put into practice by involving the Gender Office, the Departments of Mathematics and English, English Language Improvement Centre and Registrar's Office. The whole program was led by the Academic Vice President and coordinated by Gender Office. The program started after selecting 257 academically dismissed first-year female students in collaboration with the Office of the Registrar. Text materials were prepared especially for the program so as to improve the students' numeracy, communication, listening and grammar skills. Students' progress was evaluated based on frequent tests, class participation and attendance and final exams were held. The students were awarded automatic readmission based on the recommendations made by their instructors. In addition to English classes delivered by staff in the Department of English Language, the English Language Improvement centre offered English support to students supported by the VSO co-ordinator. The sessions aimed to give students the chance to improve their communication skills. Improvements, especially in speaking, general understanding of spoken English and overall confidence were observed by the VSO volunteer.

The Gender Office evaluated the overall program and found that it had had multiple academic, social and economic outcomes for the students, including:

- Enabling the students to revise, gain knowledge and improve their understanding of the subjects.
- Supporting academically dismissed students to avoid involvement in risky life styles. Academically dismissed female students tend to remain in the surrounding cities rather than going back home to their families. Consequently, many female students begin to work as housemaid or commercial sex workers and are more vulnerable to unwanted and unplanned marriage.

Recommendations - addressing gender equality in education

The following recommendations have been divided according to the community and school and education system level obstacles explored previously, and include recommendations for governments, donors (both rich country donor agencies and international non governmental organisations) and national, provincial and community level civil society organisation.

⁵¹ *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1989, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

⁵² *Child Protection Systems In Emergencies: A Discussion Paper*, 2010, Save the Children

⁵³ *Missing an Education The Big Book*, 2004, Global Campaign for Education

Community level obstacles to gender equality in education

- **Governments should develop and implement a holistic approach to address obstacle to gender equality in education.** Focusing on what happens only in the school or classroom is not enough, for example greater collaboration and participation between education authorities, civil society and communities is needed to address obstacles to gender equality in education (whether it is girls or boys that are most disadvantaged).
- **Community based organisations should support communities to analyse, plan and implement their own solutions to address obstacles to gender equality in education.** For example through working with Parent Teacher Associations to better understand the issues in their communities and develop appropriate interventions to address them.
- **Zero tolerance campaigns about violence against girls and/or boys should be developed.** Governments, donors and civil society organisations should join hands to campaign jointly (at local, provincial and national, levels) for and to ensure perpetrators of gender based violence are brought to justice. Civil society organisations should use international human rights frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child⁵¹ and mechanisms such as local child protection committees⁵² to address school or community based violence and child abuse
- **Awareness of the inequalities exacerbated by traditional gender roles should be debated nationally.** Governments, donors and civil society should work with parents and communities to instigate national debates on radio, television, newspapers and new media to challenge and transform attitudes regarding traditional gender roles for girls, boys, women and men – such as household chores, early marriage, caregivers in the home and explore alternative approaches and ways of ending harmful traditional practices (such as female genital cutting), prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory practices.
- **Parents need to be convinced of the potential and value of education for girls (or boys where they are disadvantaged).** Governments, donors and civil society should raise awareness by asking key female role-models in society who have achieved high professional or celebrity status to speak out publicly and regularly on the value of education for girls. Similar male role models could be asked to speak out in countries where boys under achievement is the problem.
- **Financial support to enable families to send their children should be increased especially for girls to schools from poor and rural households.** For example through ensuring that government scholarship or stipend schemes are properly implemented at local level or communities and families are linked to income-generating activities
- **Campaigns to end child labour should be strengthened.** Governments, donors and civil society should work collaboratively to ensure all children – girls and boys - can go to school wherever they live and whatever their household income. Conditional financial support to income poor households will go some way to addressing this, but other approaches such community led campaigns using simple techniques like ‘missing out maps’⁵³ can also be used to determine which girls or boys are missing from school and why (whether they are employed in domestic, agricultural or other forms of child labour).

⁵⁴ *Sustainable Strategies to End Conference Report Violence Against Girls in Schools, 2006*, Action Aid and the Open Society

⁵⁵ *Ibid*

School and education system level obstacles to gender equality in education

- **Adequate resources should be allocated on time to District Education Offices and Schools.** Particularly in remote and rural areas, and particularly as enrolment rates increase. Both financial and human resources should be deployed according to need. As enrolment rates increase this presents an unprecedented opportunity to address gender imbalances in the teaching staff of individual schools.
- **Donors and INGOs should support governments to implement gender-sensitive teacher training as part of the pre-service curriculum as well as part of continuing professional development.** Pre-service and in-service training curricula need to be aligned so that both newly qualified teachers and teachers with many years of service are trained in gender sensitive teaching methodologies.
- **Head-teachers and College Principals should be empowered to address gender-based violence, sexual harassment and other inappropriate behaviours of teachers in schools and colleges.** It needs to be addressed seriously and perpetrators of violence or abusers of girls or boys should be brought to justice.
- **Governments should support all schools and colleges to develop and implement sexual harassment policies and to develop alternative approaches to discipline to corporal punishment.** Learning from other countries about strategies to address violence against girls in schools should be accessed and lessons learned⁵⁴.
- **Local governments must ensure that gender issues are considered as part of all school planning processes.** In particular clean and safe segregated toilets and washrooms must be provided and monitored to enable regular attendance of girls and female teachers.
- **Civil society organisations should engage in campaigning at international and national levels on child rights issues such as sexual harassment and corporal punishment in schools.** Lessons learnt from strategies and campaigns should be shared and employed in other countries⁵⁵.
- **Donors should support governments to increase training, recruitment and deployment of female teachers where they are scarce (similar efforts should be made to train and deploy more male teachers where they are scarce).** Since teachers and other education workers act as powerful role models for girls, where there is a noticeable lack of female role models in schools, governments should:
 - improve incentives, living and working conditions for female teachers, including making adequate and equal arrangements for maternity and paternity leave (so that the burden of care for children falls equally on fathers and mothers)
 - prohibit discrimination against women, in teacher and education management recruitment, posting and promotion systems
 - set and monitor national goals or quotas for hiring women and be flexible with age and education requirements for women (while providing compensatory in-service training).
 - invest in recruitment campaigns that encourage women to break with powerful social norms and adopt teaching careers
 - allow head teachers to control teacher recruitment for their schools, to enable them to balance the number of male and female teachers
 - implement measures such as ensuring accommodation for female teachers is safe, particularly in rural areas where active recruitment and training of women from the local area may be necessary
 - improve the quality of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) to enable teacher or public service commissions to make more informed decisions about teacher deployment to address gender imbalances in schools.

VSO is a federation of member organisations that all contribute volunteers and resources from Canada, India, Ireland, Kenya, the Netherlands, the Philippines and the UK to fight poverty in more than 40 developing countries. VSO has education programmes in 15 countries. Volunteers support improvements in education by working in teacher training colleges and with schools on developing teaching methods. They also work within the mainstream education system to overcome the barriers to marginalised groups, for example, by improving policies relating to teachers and education information management systems and the provision of inclusive education in partnership with local and national government in areas such as assessment, strategic planning, national curriculum development, monitoring and evaluation, and national quality standards.

VSO also undertakes national level advocacy research through its Valuing Teachers campaign and is an active member of the Global Campaign for Education, an international coalition of charities, civil society organisations and education unions that mobilises public pressure on governments to provide the free education for all children which they promised to deliver in 2000. Since 2000, VSO's Valuing Teachers research has been conducted in 14 countries and is currently underway in three further countries. Following the research, advocacy strategies are developed, which include the development of volunteer placements in civil society education coalitions and education ministries.



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In addition to this publication, the following research may also be of interest, available from the VSO International website:

www.vsointernational.org/valuingteachers

- How Much is a Good Teacher Worth? A report of the motivation and morale of teachers in Ethiopia (2009)
- Leading Learning: a report on effective school leadership and quality education in Zanzibar (2010)
- Learning From Listening: a policy report on Maldivian teachers' attitudes to their own profession (2005)
- Lessons from the Classroom: teachers' motivation and perceptions in Nepal (2005)
- Listening to Teachers: the motivation and morale of education workers in Mozambique (2008)
- Making Teachers Count: a policy research report on Guyanese teachers' attitudes to their own profession (2004)
- Managing Teachers: the centrality of teacher management to quality education. Lessons from developing countries (2008)
- Qualifying for Quality- unqualified teacher and unqualified teacher shortages in The Gambia (2011)
- Seen But Not Heard: teachers' voice in Rwanda (2004)
- Teachers for All: what governments and donors should do (2006)
- Teachers Speak Out: a policy research report on teachers' motivation in The Gambia (2007)
- Teachers Talking: contributions of primary teachers to the quality of education in Mozambique (2011)
- Teachers' Voice: A policy research report on teachers' motivation and perceptions of their profession in Nigeria (2007)
- Teaching Matters: a policy report on the motivation and morale of teachers in Cambodia (2008)
- Valuing School Leaders: an investigation into the constraints facing school leaders in The Maldives (2009)