

## **Stockholm Congress Panel Report: Education**

This panel heard contributions from the Chair, Manzoor Ahmed, UNICEF (US); Joyce Umbima, Director (Kenya); Amihan Abueva, ECPAT (Thailand); Alice Duarte, Coordinator (Uruguay); Winsome Gordon, UNESCO; Judith Musick, Director (US). The Rapporteur was Sara Friedman, UNICEF (US).

*“Politicians, press, public continually shift attention from one simplified problem to another: drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, juvenile crime. But these are only symptoms, developmental detours confronting children. There are no simple or quick solutions; the only way to prevention is education in its most comprehensive sense.”* (a panelist)

The broad scope of education was matter-of-factly assumed by participants. Contrary to some concern that the wide scope might render the subject less than meaningful, it served instead as a viable framework for focused and interrelated discussion, sharing of experience, and suggestions in the panel and workshops. While discussion was far-reaching, several themes emerged, based partly on the topics of panelists and partly on the interests of participants. They included:

- Importance of keeping girls in school;
- Importance of life skills, education as reality as well as curriculum;
- Importance of sexuality education and challenge of winning support from families, communities and governments;
- Importance of macro- as well as micro-analysis, ie role of society at large and social and economic determinants;
- The need for partnership in bringing about change;
- The importance of children’s full participation in all educational programmes.

### **Summary of education background paper and reference to education in the Agenda for Action**

- Prevention for children at risk includes the achievement of universal primary education. 110 million children worldwide are still not enrolled in school; another 200 million drop out after 2-3 years. The gender gap must be closed. The quality and relevance of education must be improved.
- Education for children currently and formerly victimized by sexual exploitation, including those in recovery, must include literacy and numeracy, and emphasize life skills so children develop the capacity to protect themselves. There needs to be more programmes targeted to those not reached by mainstream education, and they must be linked to other support services: health, counseling, employment training and opportunity, giving children a voice.
- All education programmes must be child-centred, include full participation of children, and knowledge and the CRC.
- Education is not a panacea but a force for change, an opportunity to create a new environment in family, community, society and child.
- Public awareness and adult training and education are essential elements in changing attitudes and behaviours.

### **Importance of parents’ role in education**

This topic was covered in two ways: winning support for education for their daughters in general, and winning support for sexuality education in particular.

Decisions about what and even whether their children will learn lie largely with parents. A model programme in two districts in Kenya supported by the Ministry of Education empowers parents to make beneficial decisions for their children, especially their daughters, regarding education. They need the opportunity to make decisions that will keep their girls in school longer rather than getting married or going to work in situations where they will be abused, molested and exploited.

The programme challenges parental fears and misconceptions that school will teach children bad manners, promiscuity, to look their parents in the eye and disobey. They will learn not to respect their husbands, and get HIV/AIDS.

A second issue was the discovery that approaching the problem indirectly, through thorough addressing of the parents' own concerns, could lead to a change in attitude about their daughters' education and its role in preventing abuse and loss of opportunity. Parents learned to support each other. The programme also discovered that schools which appear to be venues for children can transform both parents and children and provide learning for parents as well.

### **Life skills, education and training of adult care-givers, social workers, educators etc**

Non-formal education for adolescents and the importance of life skills was a major topic throughout the day and an umbrella for a variety of educational aspects including sexuality and reproductive health, empowerment and leadership skills.

Adults must understand the sources of resistance and self-sabotage of high-risk girls to assistance, including violent relationships and acting out. The incidence of sexual abuse in teenage mothers and child prostitutes is alarmingly high. Such girls grow up not knowing appropriate sexual behaviour and are brainwashed into believing they don't have a right to their own body and that they exist only to satisfy the needs of other people. When we empower children, then parents must learn to relate to them in a new way.

Social workers etc working with these girls need to learn that self-esteem doesn't come only through praise, or content-free instruction to 'feel good about yourself' but by developing competencies, including academic and real-life skills. Children learn not only from curricula but from reality. On one Philippine programme, street children were brought to the Congress of their country. They saw congressmen absent, sitting around snoring, not paying attention. The congressmen were not interested in the children because they are not constituents and this is important educational information for children.

Police need training to see these girls as victims not criminals, and the public must be re-educated so that they do not see these children as 'suffering from old karma' or 'getting what they deserve'.

In public education, which is very important, specific populations must be targeted, ie government officials, tourist offices and travelers, international and local NGOs, media, academics etc. Different information and materials should be given to each sector to bring the issue of local abuse into the public arena. The media should be used to highlight the issue as a political lobby tool. Materials should be worded to aim at each sector.

### **Sexuality education**

An aspect of life skills education, sexuality, was predominant in several workshops and panel discussions. In many countries, far too little, if anything, is taught about sexuality. What is taught is information rather than education – that is, fact-based and without any relevance to the lives or experiences of children.

There is still strong resistance to sexuality education from parents, schools, communities and governments based on the espoused fear that it will encourage promiscuity in children. In one country, literature is produced in simple language for the children but there is fear to distribute it because of governmental or parental backlash. As a result, children learn from their peers, from the papers, from TV. And what they learn is harmful.

Children need to learn instead the place of sexuality in society and to develop responsible behaviour to prevent unwanted pregnancies, abuse etc. Sexuality taught properly can be a strong force for changing social values. Sexuality education goes beyond biological sex and reproduction. Its must focus on the pleasures of sex, of responsibility and relationships. The aim is for each child and adolescent to be familiar with her or his own body and to be its master. Sexuality education is not the only solution, according to a panelist who runs a programme for street children in Uruguay. But, she said, if we don't offer it, there will be legions of children on the street without knowing their own body and without knowing they are being abused.

Sexuality education must be carefully researched and designed, appropriate for different ages and stages of development. It should be included in all educational venues, formal and non-formal., the home, NGOs, communities, women's groups and local barrios or neighbourhoods. There needs to be training for all educators. The new values it promotes must be humanitarian, respectful of gender and sexual preferences.

IPPF has just produced a Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, which draws attention to the extent to which sexual and reproductive rights are recognized as human rights by the international community. Article 6 refers specifically to the right to education and information that includes sexual and reproductive health.

In Sweden, where sex education has been a compulsory subject in schools since 1956, the ethical principles articulated in the national guidelines include the following:

- No-one is entitled to use another person to satisfy their own needs.
- Physical and mental pressure always constitutes a violation of a person's personal freedom.
- Sexuality based on a close interpersonal relationship is worth striving for,
- Openness in words and pictures are central in sexuality education.
- Traditional gender roles influence people's sexual lives and must be discussed.
- Attitudes which condemn young people for having different voluntary sexual relationships are not permissible.
- Homosexuality is an expression of love between people of the same sex and has the same worth as love between people of different sexes.
- Everyone, irrespective of age, sex or disability, is entitled to take pleasure in their sexuality.

### **Girls' education**

Despite progress in enrolment, there is much to be done in terms of retention of girls in school, to the quality of their schooling and to their levels of achievement and fulfillment. The school environment itself is a barrier to successful learning in terms of harassment, teachers' attitudes, gender stereotyping in curricula and materials. There is still a long way to go in persuading parents of the value of education for their daughters beyond basic or functional literacy or numeracy.

#### *Strategies and challenges*

Some countries have new policies permitting schoolgirl mothers to return to school. But there are still negative attitudes by parents, teachers etc which need to be overcome.

The promotion of guidance counseling by Ministers of Education in some African countries to address the social well-being of girls and boys is being developed in a training package. This programme covers adolescent reproductive health, gender sensitivity, guidance counseling, social work and programme development. This should include closer attention to the social context of gender and power relations in the educational setting. For example, sexual exploitation of girls by male teachers, or the payment of girls' school fees by 'sugar daddies'.

The issue of girls' sexual behaviour is clearly related to boys' behaviour, and sexuality education programmes should address the needs of boys and girls.

### **Broader role of education as political mobilizer to deal with macro-social and economic issues and root causes**

Underlying much of the discussion was the attention to social and economic root causes and broader issues relating to commercial sexual exploitation of children and the need for education to deal with these issues.

Poverty, tourism, military bases, migration, urbanization, technology are factors that exacerbate the problem of CSEC; they are not root causes. One of the root causes is societal control over women's sexuality and there is a need to approach the problem of sexual exploitation of children from a gender perspective. Male and female sexuality are quite different and unequal, and must be understood in that context. From birth, girls are treated in a way that drives home the message that their sexuality is to be controlled and protected. Boys are encouraged to express their sexuality and as men to feel entitled to release their sexual drive with whomever they please. Many women have also been socialized to support this belief.

How do we change society so CSEC is never a problem again? How do we reverse the marginalization of women and children so they participate in the broader society? What is the place of the poor in society? How do we alter economic relationships? Ending CSEC is not just about gaining control of our bodies and minds, but of overcoming isolation and inequality, of feeling connectedness, of knowing our rights and being able to express them.

Partnerships are essential to make a real broad movement to end CSEC. Communities and NGOs need to pressure governments, who often benefit from existing political, economic and social structures. Programmes must create social movements to look at structures and how children can have a role in changing them.

There is a need for a multiplier effect in educational programmes, to reach out to more than the 10 per cent that is currently being reached, for example, in Asia. In Senegal, the NGO ENDA has amplified its programme to include 15,000 street children by partnering with other organizations and the children themselves to work with other children.

The only way to prevent CSEC is to successfully promote the health and well-being of young people in their families. In the US, the notion that society plays a role in perpetrating and perpetuating harmful messages to young people is not even recognized.