Esgela

Cooperated Effort in Girls’ Education in Afar, Ethiopia

Gender inequality remains a social problem in Ethiopia. In many parts of the country, women and girls suffer from low economic status, disparities within families, harmful traditional practices (HTP) such as early marriage and female genital mutilation, and gender-based violence (GBV). Meanwhile, limited family income forces many female students to dropout or fail in exams. In pastoralist and semi pastoralist societies in regions of Afar, Benishangul Gumuz, Gambella and Somali, such socio cultural and economic barriers greatly impede efforts to promote female students’ educational participation and attainment. Completion of secondary education is improbable for the majority of girls in these regions.

The federal and regional governments in Ethiopia have been making efforts to reduce gender inequality particularly in education, of which actions include bringing in new legislation (e.g, family law, 2000) and gender-mainstreaming in education plan and implementation. Such efforts have gradually changed gender disparity in the country to a decreasing trend, but the problem still exists.

Under such context, UNESCO-IICBA launched project “Retaining Girls in Lower Secondary Schools and Increasing their Learning Outcomes” for the above four regions in Ethiopia. The project is designed to address the challenges girls are facing in class rooms, school environment, families and communities at large, through approaches of capacity building of education stakeholders, establishing community based Girls Education Support Structure (GESS), and setting up income generation activities (IGAs). The project has exhibited remarkable changes in the lives of female students. Schools have applied Gender Responsive Pedagogy and Gender Responsive School Environment practices with emphasis given on training for teachers. Special focuses are drawn on GBV, improvement of classroom teaching and learning processes, awareness creation, and community mobilization and advocacy.

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Esgela; Meaning coordinated effort in Afar language, which is one of the pastoralist tribe in Ethiopia
Zeyneb, a 15-year-old girl studying on grade 10 in a school implemented with the project in Afar region, explained the changes in her life:

“What we all need is self-confidence and an environment that can give us equal opportunities”. Thanks to the support from my teachers and the school administration, I managed to participate in and won the 6th National Science, Technology and Mathematics competition. It was an encouragement not only for me but also for other female students. Before I got this award, people from my neighborhoods used to complain for my spending time on learning rather than helping my mom in the household and earning money. But now they mention my name as a good model to advice their children and even encourage their daughters to study.”

Zeyneb is a grade 10 student in Mohammed Hanfrey Secondary and Preparatory School, Assayita, Afar region of Ethiopia. The school locates in an arid part of the country where people’s livelihood is dominated by Pastoralist and semi Pastoralist systems.

Zeyneb is the second child of a single mother who takes care of three children by selling injera (an Ethiopian local bread). Like other girls in their neighborhood, Zeyneb assists her mother in the household chores as well as in money earning, which takes much of her school and study time. Meanwhile, pressure from the neighborhood and financial difficulties to fulfill educational materials and uniform are her major challenges of remaining in school.

The challenges did not shatter Zeyneb’s future. To assist girls from low-income families like her, a generating scheme was established in schools with financial support provided by IICBA to fulfill their needs of uniforms and educational materials. Capacity building on gender-mainstreaming was provided to teachers and other school staff. The project also created girls’ education support structure to promote community. With such efforts, Zeyneb was able to continue education and participate in the 6th National Science, Technology and Mathematics competition held in African Union, Addis Ababa in 2015. The award she earned is an indication...
of her academic strength. For the competition, she invented a mobile charger that works by solar light, an incubator, and an instrument that can identify rotten eggs. Her invention were based on her community’s problems.

“There is a problem of electricity in our town and there are times we stayed out of electricity for a week. Besides the rural parts do not have electricity at all. I think my invention of this charger can be a solution. In our society hens do not give as much egg as expected and it is also difficult to identify the rotten eggs. These are a few out of the many problems that got my attention. I will also continue to work on these kinds of invention.

*My dream is to be an engineer and assist my poor family and society. I don’t want the current situation to be a blockage to it. I have a mother who supports me and above all a school that encourages me. This year I almost dropped out because I could not afford uniform and exercise books. My school provided me and other girls without money with uniform, exercise books and sanitary pads. Thanks to these supports I managed to continue my education. My teachers are always supportive to me. They advice me and other female students to focus on our education, arrange tutorial classes and ensure our safety both in school and within the community.*

Zeyneb, also has a wish for her girl and women villagers.

“I wish the girls and women of my village and region could live in a society where all the cultural barriers toward females are eradicated, and a community who believes in the capacity of females. If we girls can get a little support from our family, schools and community, we will perform as good as the boys, and I am proud to be an exemplary for my female friends.”