



Children don't drop out of school but are pulled out by various factors.

Are Schools Free?

THE Compulsory Primary Education Act approved by the Parliament in 1991 aims to increase enrollment from 60 per cent to 90 per cent by 2000 AD. Despite the option for free education, the community response remains sluggish both in rural and urban areas because of the different engagement of the children outside the school.

Parents of working children have many excuses for depriving their children of schooling. The most important deterrent, given by parents, is the cost of schooling, even though primary education has been made free under the CPE.

The 'hidden costs' are accounted for by expenditure on uniform/clothes, transport fare, stationery and even private tuitions. The more visible costs is the admission fee of Tk 50.00 per year asked of students in some government schools.

Ain O Salish Kendra's (ASK) field workers who liaise with slum settlers, found this to be true of a basti where mothers expressed their inability to send kids to a government primary school because of these charges. The Headmaster of the school felt the demand was legitimate to pay the salary of an ayah and a darwan.

ASK's project for working children facilitates enrollment of children in regular schools. The field workers persuade the parents to send their children to government schools which are supposed to be free. In view of the contradictions seen here, it might be worth while to investigate if government schools are absolutely free and, if not, how can we motivate the community to bear the hidden costs?

At a mothers' meeting called by ASK's projects 'HELP' a similar complaint was received. The flexible timing and method used at the Jokhan Tokhan School run by 'HELP' is attractive for working children. 'HELP's' main objective is to motivate working children for enrollment and regular attendance in government schools.

Considering the interest of the children and parents in putting their children through school, it might be worth while to investigate if Government Primary Schools are absolutely cost free?

— Ain O Salish Kendra

DIPLOMAT and former politician Gertrude Mongela is fighting for women but says her most important influence was a man.

"My father was my main inspiration," says the Tanzanian woman who is secretary-general of next year's World Conference on Women in Beijing. "He still is quite a liberated man."

"He encouraged the education of his three daughters no less than that of his only son. That was quite unusual for the time and place we were living in."

"He did not discriminate. When I came home from school with excellent grades he bragged about it to his male friends while drinking the local beer."

She says her husband, too, is supportive of her career, even though he was brought up as a traditional African.

"He is of the previous generation. How can I expect him to understand the issues of this generation?" she says with a smile. "But we are all changing. In New York my husband even took the laundry out of the washing machine. He had never done that before. The trick is not to hurt the husband's ego but somehow get what you want and need."

Her mother exerted a positive and powerful influence. The family lived in a village on an island in Lake Victoria, and Mongela's mother "controlled her own money from cotton sales and made decisions with that income. My mother is hard-working and strong-willed but traditional. She was the ideal woman at the time and still stands up for principles."

But millions of men around the world favour their sons above their daughters, oppose their daughters' education and

HOPE FOR WOMEN

Even Mongela's Husband Emptied the Washing Machine

Eve Koudri Kuhn writes from Vienna

The Tanzanian diplomat responsible for organising next year's huge international conference on women hopes for action that is "more like revolution than evolution," reports Gemini News Service. And her top priority is more women in decision-making positions.

can in no way be described as liberated.

This discrimination is reflected internationally: "Women have an obvious concern with peace, and particular skills to bear but how many women are on the Disarmament Commission or involved in peacekeeping efforts?" asks Mongela.

"Women are important in world trade, and yet are still essentially absent from GATT decisions."

"How many women are involved in the decisions that determine economic development made by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund?"

The Beijing Conference is supposed to help move the world away from such attitudes. It is easy to be cynical about the sort of huge international gathering that 47-year-old Mongela is coordinating but she expresses confidence that the conference "will be a milestone for women." She wants action that is more like revolution than evolution.

"It will take place 50 years after the United Nations set its global objectives. It will also be an opportunity to see how far we have travelled toward achieving the objectives for the



"We have the same tasks but different short-term targets. We need to become more sensitive to each other's needs."

Her aim is to channel the diversity of women and women's interests "to create energy and action in a positive way."

"That is one of my convictions. I want to categorise needs, but they should not be used to keep us apart."

Nor does she want to keep men and women apart. She is not a "traditional feminist": "I am against the system that endows them with dominance."

"We have to move to another stage, where we no longer want to talk about a conflict between men and women but gender perspectives in society."

"Our focus should be to see how women are affected by global problems and how they themselves can bring about solutions to these problems."

That means bringing gender into areas where it was previously thought irrelevant — such as peace-keeping, trade and the World Bank.

So a key issue is a bigger role for women in decision-making, from the community level to the international, in

politics, economic and development. Without this, she warns, there will be no sustainable development.

And she praises UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali for his instructions on the appointment of women to ensure the UN meets its target of women in half the organisation's high-level posts by 1995.

"Women will be considered first for posts," she explains. "If a man is selected, it must be proven that they searched for a suitable candidate and sincerely failed to find one. In order to do that, the post must stay vacant for a year while they try to fill it with a woman."

Her main concern, as a three-times Minister — of Health, Social Welfare and Tourism — and as Ambassador to India and the United States, is development: "Looking at so many issues, I find that women have problems because of their level of development."

Ways of tackling the problem have changed, she notes, because of economic changes, such as the increased emphasis on market-based systems, the effects of structural adjustment programmes in developing countries and the increasing economic difficulties of the industrialised countries.

They create a need for a new approach to economic policy which will deal with the problems of unemployment as well as promoting investment and alleviating poverty.

It is a huge task, but Mongela is a woman used to getting what she wants — even when it comes to getting her husband to take the clothes out of the washing machine.

The writer is a freelance journalist based in Vienna.

THE "in" topic these days is gender studies and development. In Asia multitudes of NGOs and UN organizations are working towards uplifting the status of women, educating them, trying to put a quantitative value on their work, even.

Almost a decade ago, was the UN declared Decade for Women. Women's years and days and all the big money spent on Women's work projects, is possibly helping groups of women in pocketed areas. But, in the broader scheme of things how much has women's status improved? And how do men and women in Asia look at women's rights? How much have we changed people's, including policy makers', perceptions?

I work for an UN organization as a research assistant and honestly, when I first started working, was extremely gung-ho about the programme I was involved in. We deal with women, education and empowerment. In theory the project is excellent and throughout Asia and the Pacific has had some excellent feedback, but for how long? I mean how long-term is my project or any one else's for that matter? Three weeks into the work, I realized so much of it was bureaucratic jargon and "expert group" meetings and conflicts with secretaries who refuse to share their computer paper.

Burning and Stoning of Women Should Stop

by Schrezad Joya Monami Latif



This is a new era where it is expected that NGOs do the development work in a country. What about the governments of Third World countries? NGOs and UN groups can only do so much. Unfortunately, for women, NGOs cannot push hundred years of patriarchy out of the door of the parliament houses or the homes of the masses. Women's inferior status is deeply ingrained in the minds of men and women in Asia. What is obvious to me, is that direct and definite legislative action with the policy makers of a country is the only way to better women's status.

When men are our strength. Obviously, men are, too. But women's strengths need to be recognized and taken into the national policies. Women's strengths are forever being talked about, written about, argued about. But when looking at the broader picture, what has really changed in Asia at the national level, where women are concerned? One is condemned to death for the power of her pen, two others lead nations, another put under house arrest, her rulers afraid of the power of her leadership. Yet we still read about a woman adulterer being stoned, while her male partner in crime walks (Bangladesh); or a woman and her daughter being kidnapped because her son was part of an opposition party in the village (India). Why is it that in South Asia "badia"

or revenge almost always involves a woman and her honor, and thus the honor of the family or tribe?

Grameen Bank has done tremendous work, banked on women, and shown the world that it can work. Other NGOs such as Proshikha, BRAC, Women for Women and CAMPE — they too, are dedicated to the betterment of women's lives, and in that way, the life of rural Bangladesh. But their dedication, to have wide and encompassing results, positive ones that is, needs a larger body that wields larger power.

It is really maddening working in development work for women, because we see all this good that is being done, yet, so little changes. In Thailand for example, the NGOs work with educating women and their families in the Northeast against sending their daughters to earn for the family in Bangkok, because 90 per cent of these young women who leave village life for the lure of the big city and the aching hunger in their bellies, end up selling their bodies to feed their families in the provinces. But what has changed in Thailand regarding

development — to develop them and our countries? The man's statement signified to me the consent of policy makers at home and around the globe to let NGOs do token even substantial work but not to go the distance, all the way into self-reliance for all women, a higher standard of living for all women, the betterment of a whole country which I feel can only be done with direct government action. There is no end to learning or to development for that matter.

The key way the government can help of course, is through education — relevant education. Education that teachers women to become more self-reliant through self income schemes of their own, not just knitting and making baskets but also entrepreneurial work of their own. To continue the education process by reading and teaching their children too.

Through education women can learn about their rights and how much an equal part of society they are; about sanitation and how to eat right, the proper nutrients during pregnancies, about the valuable contribution they can make to better the lives of their children.

Policy makers can change curriculum in schools that teaches sex stereotyping and discrimination. Governments can pass laws that makes primary and secondary education compulsory for one and all. Thailand did it, as early as in the twenties, and because of that enjoys one of the highest literacy rates in the region. In Viet Nam, Ho Chi Minh declared war on illiteracy. The Vietnamese won the war against illiteracy just like they did the countless others in their history. Today, illiteracy is only a problem in the remote mountainous regions of Viet Nam where hill-tribe.

The governments of countries in the region can see to it that for each man that hits his wife, there is just punishment; that each time a woman is burned for inadequate dowry, her husband is burned too; and that each time a woman is part of the "badia", for the crimes that men commit, she doesn't have to hang her head in shame for her innocence. All this will take legislation and more significantly, a change in the way people think. This can be done through positive enforcement in the media: movies, television and radio; in school books, through dramas and plays. What better way to do all this, work that NGOs have been trying to do on their own for decades, through one all-encompassing package, than through the government? A government democratically elected such as in most Asian countries is after all a government for the people, by the people.

Bangladesh Women Report Postpartum Health Problems

by Liz Goodburn

Many women in Bangladesh suffer health problems after they have given birth. More than four women in every 10 said they had problems when they were interviewed two weeks after delivery in a survey.

THERE has been little epidemiological or operational research on the postpartum period in developing countries. In collaboration with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine BRAC recently completed a study of maternal morbidity relating to delivery and the puerperium.

The study used a combination of survey, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and observation.

The burden of morbidity in the postpartum period may be particularly high. In the BRAC pilot study, more than 40 per cent of women reported a health problem related to delivery when interviewed at two weeks after the birth. Just over half (52 per cent) of women who had delivered recently had signs or symptoms of anaemia.

Nutritional anaemia is common among women in Bangladesh and the condition is made worse by increased requirements following pregnancy, lactation and blood loss at delivery. In Bangladesh, iron supplementation is usually not available to women at this time.

Of the women in the BRAC study, 17 per cent had signs of infection when seen two weeks after delivery. More than half had signs of severe malnutrition. Tradition imposes food restrictions on Bangladeshi women during the postpartum period.

Six out of 10 infant deaths in Bangladesh happen in the first month of life. If the baby has low birth weight, the risk of death is even greater. In the BRAC study more than half the newborn infants weighed less than 2.5 kilograms.

As in many traditional cultures, colostrum is discarded and the baby may not be put to the breast until several days after birth. Although breastfeeding is almost universal in Bangladesh, 11 per cent of mothers reported breast problems such as cracked nipples or abscesses during the puerperium.

The study by BRAC showed that women have a wide knowledge of the problems they may face after delivery but that their usual response is to send to traditional healers for medicines.

The women saw their vulnerability at this time as due to susceptibility to evil spirits. They expressed a fear of going out that served to reinforce the idea of seclusion due to

POSTPARTUM CARE

After delivery, everyone is so busy looking after the baby that sometimes the mother's needs are neglected. The health care provider should ensure that all women have at least one postpartum visit within three days of delivery.

- Give advice on diet**
Infants need milk to grow but children need to eat the baby's milk. Health care providers should encourage mothers to breastfeed. A mother's milk is the best food for the baby. The mother should eat a healthy diet of fruits, vegetables, and fish.
- Check uterine size and tenderness**
Normal pain should be used to check that the uterus is returning to normal size.
- Check perineal tears**
Examination of perineal area should be done to check for any lacerations or tears. Minor lacerations should be kept clean and dry.
- Detect and manage infections**
Fever, chills and discharge from the vagina are signs of infection. Health care providers should check for signs of infection. Women should be advised to seek care if they have a fever or discharge.
- Detect and treat anaemia**
The mother needs iron supplements such as iron pills and iron-rich foods. Iron deficiency can lead to anaemia. Health care providers should check for signs of anaemia.
- Comfort the breastfed**
Mothers should be advised to breastfeed on demand and to seek help if they have difficulty.
- Provide help with breast feeding**
Mothers should be encouraged to breastfeed on demand. Health care providers should check for signs of breast problems.
- Deal with breast problems**
Nipple soreness, cracked nipples or abscesses should be treated. Health care providers should check for signs of breast problems.
- Provide advice on contraception**
Women should be advised to use contraception to prevent pregnancy. Health care providers should check for signs of pregnancy.

The postpartum visit should also be used to check the baby, paying particular attention to cord care, signs of hypothermia or infection and feeding problems.

SAFE MOTHERHOOD

impurity.

It was apparent that if postpartum care is to be of any value in rural Bangladesh, where 95 per cent of deliveries occur at home, it must be provided by home visiting.

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