

TALKING POINTS BY NAHLA HAIDAR AT DIHAD 2014 "WOMEN & AID"

EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION:

REFERENCE TO THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ART.26

- The right to education is outlined in several international and regional human rights treaties, most significantly the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) . Between them, these constitute 'the most comprehensive set of legally binding commitments concerning both rights to education and to gender equality'.
- Education has long been considered principally as a development goal; hence, in times of crisis/conflict it was suspended. However nowadays Education features increasingly as one of the main Human rights and as such is more exposed to violations during crisis/conflicts.,
- There is no shortage of knowledge about the importance of education for women and girls; countless academic publications and project evaluations have documented good practices. However, patriarchy and gender inequality are still structurally embedded in society. Governments have uneven levels of political will and institutional capacity to enact and enforce laws and policies to overcome these factors and thus enshrine the right to education. Moreover, even in cases where policies exist they frequently lack the human and financial resources as well as the budget frameworks necessary to achieve the right to education.
- Although the goal of gender parity in enrollments of girls at the primary level has witnessed some improvements, the results are misleading as they detracted the attention from the need to provide support for and investment in, policies, that will ensure that girls can stay in school and acquire the learning they need to empower them throughout life.
- Improved access to education by no means implies an end to girls' marginalization and discrimination in education. Several reports from the Education For ALL Initiative (EFA) reveal that across the globe girls are still excluded and discriminated-against at every level of education.

Although enrollment figures are improving, once girls get into school they face numerous challenges and are far less likely than boys to keep attending, keep learning, and make progress to secondary education. The right to education continues to be violated for millions of girls and true gender equality in education — and beyond — remains far from being achieved. First, we need to address the violations of human rights which are at the heart of the education crisis in conflict-affected countries. We cannot build peaceful societies overnight.

But there is no justification for the attacks on children, the widespread and systematic rape of girls and women or the destruction of school facilities documented in many Reports. It is unacceptable that, despite a succession of United Nations Security Council resolutions, sexual terror remains a weapon of war – a weapon that is inflicting untold suffering, fear and insecurity on young girls and women, and untold damage on their education, their health and their lives.

- The humanitarian aid system still has a narrow definition of emergency needs. In countries affected by emergencies, the local communities strive to maintain education. Unfortunately, aid donors do not match that resolve.

The education sector currently receives 1.4% of humanitarian aid – and the humanitarian aid system itself is underfunded.

- Many children drop out of school before completing a full primary cycle. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, 10 million children drop out of primary school every year, two third are girls. About 17% of the world's adults – 796 million people – still lack basic literacy skills. Nearly two-thirds are women. Gender disparities continue to hamper progress in education. Had the world achieved gender parity at the primary level in implementing the MDGs, there would have been an additional 3.6 million girls in primary school. Wider inequalities are restricting opportunity. In Pakistan, almost half of the children aged 7 to 16 from the poorest households are out of school, compared with just 5% from the richest households.
- Gender disadvantage is costing lives. Women with secondary education are far more likely to be aware of measures for preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV, which contributed to an estimated 260,000

fatalities from HIV-related illness in 2011. In Malawi, 60% of mothers with secondary education or higher were aware that drugs could reduce transmission risks, compared with 27% of women with no education.

- The quality of education remains poor in many countries. Millions of children are emerging from primary school with reading, writing and numeracy skills far below expected level. In addition when girls enter school they bring the disadvantages associated with wider gender inequality, which are often transmitted through households, communities and established social practices. Education systems can weaken the transmission lines, but building schools and classrooms and supplying teachers is not enough. Getting girls into school and equipping them with the skills they need to flourish often require policies designed to counteract the deeper causes of gender disadvantage. Public policy can make a difference in three key areas: creating incentives for school entry, facilitating the development of a 'girl-friendly' learning environment and ensuring that schools provide relevant skills. In most cases, simultaneous interventions are required on all three fronts.
- Donors are not holding to their commitments to increase aid – and the commitments fall short of the financing levels required in education. International aid stagnated in 2011 and the latest OECD survey of donor spending plans points to an additional shortfall in 2012.

This bleak picture looks even worse when estimates for programmable aid are taken into account. With donor countries facing fiscal pressures of their own, the gulf between commitments and aid delivered could widen. Past financial crisis in donor countries have reduced aid by 20% to 25% from levels expected before the crisis. This provides a reminder of the political vulnerability of aid budgets in an economic downturn.

Conclusion:

- We need to ensure that the post-MDG framework and the specific goal for education include comprehensive targets that address governance and implementation issues, as well as policies for retention, completion and learning for girls and boys.
- We need to make the case for putting education at the centre of the humanitarian aid effort.

- Last but not least, we need to unlock the full potential of education to act as a force for peace. “ It is in the minds of men [and women] that the defences of peace must be constructed”(UNESCO). No defences are more secure than public attitudes grounded in tolerance, mutual respect and commitment to dialogue. These attitudes should be actively cultivated every day in every classroom across the world.