

Bachelor thesis article Fieneke de Jong

Title: Local female teachers as agents of change

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Local female teachers as agents of change

By Fieneke de Jong

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With only five years left until the 2015 deadline to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, it is still a long way to go for Ethiopia. Part of the third goal, to eliminate gender disparity in primary education, is not yet reached. Only one third of the students are female. And about 30% of the school age population is not going to school. Especially in the pastoralists areas education is lacking behind. For my Bachelor thesis at Van Hall Larenstein university Wageningen in The Netherlands, I did fieldwork in Harshin region. I researched why a lot of girls are still not going to school. As a solution I promote to educate local girls to become teachers.

For this research I came to Ethiopia to do three months of fieldwork. Together with the Institute for Pastoral and Agro pastoral Studies of Haramaya University, I gathered information about education and gender in pastoral areas. The fieldwork is done in Harshin, Somali Region and is focussing on the rural area.

In this region about 90% is pastoralist. There pastoral way of life makes it difficult for the government to supply them with facilities like education. Therefore the government is pushing the population to settle down. Till now, this has not been successful.

Somali Region is one of the least developed regions in Ethiopia. At this moment only 1% of the rural population is literate. Recent improvements in education makes that at this moment a growing number of children is able to go to school. However, much more boys than girls are going to primary school. To explain this difference and to come up with possible solution this research was set up.

There are several reasons why girls do not go to school. Most important is the limited awareness of the parents. They do not see the benefits which education will give, especially for girls. Therefore parents prefer the girls to stay home and do various tasks like looking after the goats. Moreover, the shortage of schools is a disadvantage for girls. Physically, boys are stronger. Girls cannot travel as far as boys every day.

There are also other reasons which play a role. The climate inside school is not very favourite for girls. In most places there are only male teachers, no female teachers. Often separate sanitary facilities for girls are missing. Furthermore it is difficult for girls to participate as good as boys. The Somali culture tells girls to be silent, which makes them more shy in class.

The biggest obstacle is the lack of role models in society. Parents do not see women who did benefit through their education. Therefore they do not think education will help their daughters to get a better life. Girls themselves love going to school. They like it much more than working for their parents. Moreover, their parents are proud of them if they can read a letter for them. But girls who are not going to school are not able to convince the parents.

Possible solutions have to show to the parents the impact which education can have on the lives of their children. They also have to provide good education with the attention which girls need. These requirements can be combined by educating local girls to become teachers in their home area. That would show parents how education can give you a respected job and improve your life. In addition, these female teachers can create the special attention for girls which they lack at this moment. For parents and students these female teachers would be role models. It will show that also girls benefit from education. So that parent will send all their boys and girls to school. And all boys and all girls will be able to have a good time at school.

It will take time to educate girls to become teachers. This solution as such will not be sufficient to reach the development goals before 2015. It does not solve the lack of schools. But it will absolutely help to reach gender parity in education. It will inspire boys but especially girls and their parents. In this way, local girls will become agents of change.

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