

Reaching the marginalized

Stories from the classroom - India

Living with stigma in India

For India's 'rat catchers,' stigmatization undermines the self-esteem vital to learning. 'The higher-caste students tell us that we smell bad,' one girl said. Another added: 'The ridicule we face prevents us from coming to school and sitting with higher-caste children.' These girls from the hamlet of Khalispur, near the city of Varanasi, belong to the Mushara or 'rat catcher' community of eastern Uttar Pradesh, India.

Despite an entitlement to receive a stipend, midday meals and uniforms, few Mushara girls attend Khalispur's government primary school. 'We are forced to sit on the floor,' one girl said. 'The desks and benches in the classroom are meant for the children from the higher castes.'

Stories from the classroom - Kenya

When livelihoods and schools don't match: Pastoralists in Kenya

Kenya's pastoralists, struck by drought, say they need schools that follow their herds. Nasra Hassan, 7, was enrolled at Basaa Primary School in the Merti Division of Isiolo, a remote district of Northern Kenya. But then the drought hit. The drought has left four million Kenyans in need of emergency food aid, and pastoralist areas have been among the worst affected. Instead of studying, Nasra is now busy washing, cooking and fetching water and firewood.

Nasra's parents no longer have the money for her education. And as herders have to travel farther in search of water, there are fewer people to help with household chores, so Nasra stays home. The tension between securing livelihoods and gaining education is a recurrent theme in pastoral areas. As one parent in Isiolo said, 'The educational system that fits us will be the one that follows us, that follows our animals.'

Reaching the marginalized

Stories from the classroom – The Philippines

War keeps children out of school in the Philippines

In the Mindanao region of the Philippines, ongoing conflict hits education twice over. Mohammed's new home is a tent on the grounds of a school, yet he has little time to attend class. For him and many other children in an evacuation camp, helping his parents supplement meager food rations is now his priority. 'I can only go to classes in the morning because I have to look for vegetables and firewood outside the camp and return before dark,' he said.

Mohammed, 13, is the eldest of five children who are taking refuge with their parents and grandparents in a camp in the Datu Gumbay Piang Elementary School in Maguindanao. Heavy clashes between the military and separatist rebels in the Mindanao region of the Philippines have left hundreds of thousands of civilians stranded in government evacuation camps, often set up in schools such as this one.

Stories from the classroom – Peru

Peru: The critical role of bilingual education

In a classroom in Lima, bilingual teaching makes children feel welcome. As Ema Franco explains basic hygiene rules for preventing the spread of swine flu to 10 children aged five to seven, she speaks in both Spanish and Shipibo. Of the six teachers assigned to the school, Ema is one of two bilingual teachers of Shipibo descent. The state-run "Comunidad Shipiba" school in Cantagallo, a poor district to the east of Lima, hosts over 50 indigenous Shipibo and mestizo (mixed race) pupils whose families fled to Lima a decade ago to escape guerrilla warfare.

"We speak them in the classroom so that the children can feel they belong to the wider community. They have to learn to appreciate their culture and to overcome their fears. Some children are reluctant to reveal they are Shipibos", says the head teacher, Rosario Amasifúen, also a Shipibo.

Reaching the marginalized

Stories from the classroom – Lao PDR

Reaching children with disabilities in Lao PDR

Including children with disabilities in regular classes holds lessons for everyone.

Lily was enrolled in her local pre-school before her third birthday, even though she couldn't stand, walk or talk. As part of an inclusive education programme, the local pre-school agreed to take Lily, now 6, whose cerebral palsy affects her movement, her speech and her ability to write and draw.

From an early age, Lily faced negative attitudes and comments. Lily's mother says: "For the first 18 months she couldn't talk, but the teachers encouraged her and it made a big difference. I think their positive attitude has been so important for Lily – she loves going to school." Lily's headmistress says: "Going to school with someone like Lily is a great opportunity for these children – they are learning so much from her but also it will help to reduce negative attitudes to disability in our community."

Stories from the classroom – Tanzania

From street child to star pupil in Tanzania

In Tanzania, adolescents get a second chance to gain skills that can change their lives. At the age of 10, Ramadhani Ibrahim, who lives in the Chamwino slums of Morogoro, had never set foot in a school. He had already left home to support his family by selling shopping bags in the street. Ramadhani remembers how he came to be supported by the Faraja Trust: "One day I was selling vegetables in the streets a man and woman approached and asked me several questions. They then told me that they would like to send me to school. I couldn't believe it! When I went home and told my mother, she cried with joy."

"For the two years that I spent at Faraja's Street Side School, I was at the top of the class. After the two years at SSS, I joined Bungo Primary School in class IV. I later became first in my class of 151 pupils. In 2003 I sat for Standard Seven National Examination. I came out first in Morogoro Region and was selected to join Mzumbe Secondary School — a special school for talented students. I am very happy as my dream has come true."

Reaching the marginalized***Stories from the classroom – Bangladesh*****In Bangladesh, a stipend makes all the difference**

For people trapped in poverty, a small aid payment can open the doors to education. Anju Begum was only 11 when she got married. She and her husband Mojammel have three children – two daughters and a son. They had sent their elder two children to the local government primary school, but their income wasn't enough to keep their children in school. 'I could not feed my children. Sending them to school was a far cry,' Anju says.

Anju started receiving 105 taka (about US\$1.50) of weekly stipend from the Bangladesh non-government organization BRAC, which convinced Anju to put her children back into school. 'They encouraged me saying that someday my children will be educated, they will earn money and people will respect them.' Her son Nafchu was happy to get back to school and has just completed grade 3. Nafchu wants to be a teacher after finishing his studies, so he can help children who cannot afford to go to school.

Stories from the classroom – Gaza**Making up for lost time after Gaza's traumatizing war**

Catch-up classes help children in Gaza recover from a terrifying conflict. Esra El-hello, 17, saw her father and brother killed in the war in Gaza in January 2009 and had to flee the house with the rest of the family. While she was in hiding, her 1-year-old niece died from her injuries. The experience still gives her nightmares, she says, and could easily have jeopardized her promising academic future. 'I was an excellent student and the best in my class. With the war, everything changed. They encouraged us to go back to school afterwards, but I could not concentrate. I could not talk or interact with anyone. How could I study?' Esra says.

'My family encouraged me to try to start exam preparations again; they said education is my future. I could not stop crying and shouting, but I have two sisters in university, and when I saw them go back, I decided to go back to school as well,' Esra explains. 'I am so glad I did.' Esra was one of 4,000 students who benefited from catch-up classes organised by UNESCO, and in June 2009 she completed university entrance exams.

Reaching the marginalized***Stories from the classroom – Afghanistan*****In Afghanistan, literacy starts with the mother tongue**

Classes in their own language give students confidence to learn others. Ali lives in a village in the Dara-i-Noor district of Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan. When he was 13, he was forced to drop out of 7th grade and join a 4th grade class because he was illiterate. But he still couldn't understand Pashto, the official language – his mother tongue is Pashai. Ali (not his real name) hated to go to school and felt ashamed to be with younger children in his new class.

The dropout rate among children who speak Pashai is over 50% because the language used in primary schools is alien to them. In early 2006, when a Pashai literacy class started in his village, his father sent Ali. Within a few months Ali was literate in Pashai, and gained so much confidence that soon he was literate in Pashto, too. Now he goes to school 30 minutes earlier than others.