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**Right to Education for All Children in Vanuatu – Are Girls
Getting an Equal Opportunity to Education Compared to
Boys?**

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Vanuatu's international legal obligations in respect of educating female children and what steps have been taken to meet those legal obligations. It provides a literature review of how national legal frameworks and policies can be developed to meet international legal commitments. It concludes that, whilst Vanuatu's domestic legal frameworks do meet legal obligations and that Vanuatu's policy statements also show commitment and support for equity of access to education, more needs to be done to overcome social and cultural barriers which may make education institutes an 'unfriendly' environment for girls.

KEYWORDS

CRC, International Law, Education, Discrimination, Marriage, Custom

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of female children failing to receive or continue with formalized education is an international problem. Between 1999 and 2006, the worldwide number of children not in school declined from about a 100 million to 75 million. However, girls still constitute 55% of all children that have not attended school, down from 59% in 1999. Worldwide, for every 100 boys out of school there are 122 girls. In some countries the gender gap is much wider. For example, for every 100 boys out of school in Yemen there are 270 girls, in Iraq 316 girls, in India 426 girls, and in Benin 257 girls.¹ The issue is quite prevalent worldwide and is also a common problem within the region of the South Pacific. The Melanesian region seems to have the lowest rate of enrolled female children compared to male children. In 2000, for every 100 boys enrolled into primary, secondary and tertiary schools, Papua New Guinea had 86, 67 and 55 enrolled girls. In the Solomon Islands, there were 86 girls in primary, 70 in secondary and 30 in tertiary schools.²

This is also an issue in Vanuatu where compared to a 100 boys at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, there were 91, 93 and 50 girls, respectively.³ Fortunately today, most leaders of Vanuatu have realised that educating their young is the way to achieve this primary objective.⁴ Consequently, there has been a slow yet steady progress towards achieving this goal over the past few decades.

The broad objective of this paper is to conduct a literature review to ascertain whether girls have an equal opportunity to partake and continue with formalised education in Vanuatu. This paper will analyse and describe what the Government of Vanuatu's legal obligations are towards ensuring that female children are not hindered from receiving and continuing formalised education. As such, the paper discusses international laws signed and ratified by the Government and also the formulation of domestic laws. It will further identify current policies that address the issue of gender disparities in Vanuatu. It will then look at data for rate of enrolment of girls into levels of formalised education institutions, that is, pre-schools, primary schools, secondary schools and vocational training centres, from the years 1979 to 2007, as compared to boys in Vanuatu (where available). It seeks to identify the remaining barriers that contribute to the reasons why girls face difficulties in terms of enrolment into schools and continuing their education. Finally, the paper will conclude by suggesting some further possible interventions that the Government of Vanuatu can implement to ensure that there is an equal opportunity for girls to access education minimising the gap of gender disparity.

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK – GOVERNMENT OF VANUATU'S LEGAL OBLIGATIONS TOWARDS ENSURING EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR GIRLS AS COMPARED TO BOYS

In Vanuatu, the primary source of law establishing equal opportunity for female children to formal education is prescribed in its *Constitution*.⁵ Section 5 states the fundamental rights and freedom of individuals in Vanuatu stating that all persons are entitled to these rights and freedoms without gender discrimination.⁶ It also demands equal treatment of all persons under the law with recognition of special benefits, welfare, protection and advancement of females, children and young persons.⁷ The enforcement⁸ of fundamental rights and the duty to respect the rights and freedoms of others⁹ has also been incorporated in the *Constitution*.

These fundamental rights and freedoms have been adopted from international human rights documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). They are further supported by Vanuatu's ratification of international human rights conventions.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ¹⁰ is one source of fundamental rights and freedom in Vanuatu. The Convention states that all children have the right to education based on equal opportunity regardless of age, gender or race.¹¹ Additionally, State parties are to ensure that all children are protected from all forms of discrimination.¹² Article 28 compels state parties to progressively achieve this right by:-

- making primary education compulsory, available and free to all;
- developing different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, and make them accessible and available to every child, along with the introduction of free education and financial assistance in case of need;
- making higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity;
- making educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children; and
- taking measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.¹³

The State of Vanuatu signed the CRC in September 1990¹⁴ and ratified the CRC in July 1993.¹⁵ It is the only country in the South Pacific to have domesticated the Convention through its CRC (Ratification) Act.¹⁶

The international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)¹⁷ *has also been signed* by the State of Vanuatu in July 1993¹⁸ and ratified through its CEDAW (Ratification) Act¹⁹ *in September 1995.*²⁰ Article 10 prescribes for State parties to ensure that there is no gender discrimination in the field of education. Some of the provisions which directly address the issue advise State parties to achieve the goals under Article 10 by:-

- providing the same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories. Equality is to be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education as well as vocational training;
- providing for access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality;
- the elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programmes and the adaptation of teaching methods;
- providing the same opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants;
- providing the same opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes;
- reducing female student drop-out rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely.²¹

The United Nations Millennium Summit 2000 established eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). MDGs are however not a legal commitment but is a common platform for signatory state party countries to address development issues of poverty in its many dimensions, of which universal primary education and the empowerment of women are included.²² Two of the MDGs are relevant to the issue at hand. Goal 2 describes the

achievement of universal primary education which ensures that all children complete a full course of primary schooling. Secondly, Goal 3 was to ensure the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women through the elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education. The foremost plan of action towards achieving this goal is to ensure that schooling is readily accessible to all children and adolescents and that basic education is available to all families.²³ These goals are to be achieved by State parties by the year 2015. As a member state to this Summit, Vanuatu has further reaffirmed this responsibility towards ensuring a gender balance in the enrolment of girls by achieving these goals by the year 2015.

In order to help implement these commitments, Vanuatu passed the Education Act 2001. Vanuatu's Education Act²⁴ legislates against discrimination based on gender for enrolment of school children. The objective of the Act is to provide primary and secondary education of a high standard to all children with available resources, to expand access to secondary education, to eliminate educational disadvantages arising from the gender of a child, or a child's economic, social, cultural circumstances, to assist each child to achieve his or her full educational potential, and to provide education to children that gives them access to opportunities for training, employment or further study.²⁵ Provisions in this Act provide protection to children, especially females, in that schools are not to exercise disparities in the enrolment of children into schools.

2.1 [SECTION] 8 PROHIBITION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

*(1) A child is not to be refused admission to any school on account of his or her gender, religion, nationality, race, language or disability.*²⁶

There have also been many national policies and strategic usage of plans which address the issue of equal opportunity to formal education for girls in Vanuatu. The key developments and policies are described below.

2.2 COMPREHENSIVE REFORM PROGRAMME 1997 (CRP)

In 1997, the Government of Vanuatu introduced the Comprehensive Reform Programme. The CRP established nine benchmarks out of which education was the eighth. Under the program educational reforms were planned. Key reforms included a national goal of 10 years' of schooling by 2010; a collaboration between government, churches, NGOs and women's groups to combat illiteracy and address the gender imbalance in post primary education; and encouraging private sector to contribute towards training programs and scholarships.²⁷

2.3 EDUCATION MASTER PLAN 2000-2010

Vanuatu's Education Master Plan is a Ministry of Education policy development initiative, which incorporated the EFA National Plan of Action, the Ministry of Education Corporate Plan 2004-2006 and the 1999 Master Plan, along with the views of members of the education sector and the greater community.²⁸ It was prepared by the World Bank identifying that a small percentage of female children proceeded to higher levels of education, including training programs after primary school which created the notable rates of post-primary education drop-outs.²⁹ The key reasons for this identified was due to the social and cultural practises that parents imposed on female children.³⁰

The Master Plan aims to provide basic education of eight years for all children by 2010. It suggests that apart from its primary strategy of providing universal basic education to all children, especially female children, the environment in schools could be made more

attractive to encourage parents to keep their girls at school.³¹ The plan seeks to address this issue concerning drop-outs through the construction of more physical structures for schools and providing more facilities and increasing the number of qualified school teachers in schools to accommodate for the growth of school-age children.³²

2.4 EDUCATION FOR ALL NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION 2002-2006

In 2001 Vanuatu launched its National Plan of Action in the education sector with an objective to provide education to all children by 2015.³³ The action plan has is inclusive of a gender equity policy which has set out its priority areas. Priority 2 states that by 2015, female children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities will have access to a complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality. Priority 6 states that gender disparities in primary and secondary education will be eliminated by 2003 and by 2015 gender equality in education will be achieved with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access and achievement in basic education of good quality.³⁴ Currently, this has been achieved as the rate of enrolment of girls in primary and secondary schools is at an equal level. However, the action plan seeks to address further issues such as high drop-out rates of girls in secondary schools and the subsequent limited access to tertiary education.³⁵

The Government is already underway with achieving the goals set in this plan of action and also Goal 2 of the MDGs, in addressing the issue of drop-out rates in female children. Plans were made to introduce two more years in the primary school system, that is, Year 7 and 8, in 2006. Such an approach planned to increase the rate of enrolment of girls in Year 6 by 58% as compared to the rate in 2004. Through such an approach it also aimed to provide the much needed educational base for further vocational and lifelong learning skills.³⁶ This plan has already been eventuated in schools around Vanuatu.

2.5 PRIORITIES AND ACTION AGENDA (PAA) 2003

In an effort to refocus the activities of the CRP, the Priorities and Action Agenda was formed by the Government and donors in 2003.³⁷ Overall development goals were prioritised in the PAA to link policy and planning to the finite resources that government controls. One of the five national priorities articulated in the PAA have direct relevance to the issue of equal opportunity to formal education for female children. The major goal is to increase equal access to income and economic opportunity by all members of the community.³⁸ One of the specific areas of focus is to provide universal primary education, completion and improved access to a quality education and training systems that better contributes to economic and social development.³⁹

The main policy objectives are to improve access to education and ensure gender and rural/urban balances; and improve planning, fiscal and financial management in the sector. Some priorities and strategies in the education sector are to improve the relevance, quality and accessibility to pre-school for all children as stipulated in the Education For All National Plans and the MDGs; achieve relevant and quality universal primary education up to Year 8; promote gender equality throughout all levels of education; and to develop an expenditure framework for education, ensuring that there is effective and efficient resource allocation in the education sector.⁴⁰

Vanuatu has progressed a great deal towards achieving gender equity in school enrolments through the creation of formal laws and the implementation of these laws through policy. When compared to the past twenty years, the Government has accomplished much success in eliminating gender disparities in the field of enrolment rates between male and female

children in formal education institutions. According to figures describing the current rate of enrolment of girls into schools of all levels, there has been an increase in enrolment. There is an apparent overall minimisation in the gender disparity gap.

Table: Percentage enrolment rates of male and female children in pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary education, including vocation training, during the years 1979 till 2007, in Vanuatu.⁴¹

		⁴²	⁴³			
Pre-school	M	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	23.2
	F	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	23.6
Primary School	M	572	6376	91	93	80
	F	326	5683	91	92	81
Secondary School	M	65	756	31	41	56
	F	25	687	27	35	55
Tertiary Education	M	5	25	31.8	N/A	N/A
	F	3	23	28.8	N/A	N/A
Vocational Training	M	N/A	N/A	71.0 ⁴⁴	N/A	N/A
	F	N/A	N/A	29.0 ⁴⁵	N/A	N/A
Key –						
M – Male						
F – Female						
JS – Junior Secondary						
SS – Senior Secondary						
N/A – Data not available						

The statistics above show a current equal rate of enrolment between boys and girls in schools, at secondary school level and below. However, the data is quite superficial. Statistics do not indicate the rate of attendance, quality of education received by female children or their day to day participation in schools. There are still a number of barriers that hinder the opportunity for female children to equally attend and participate in formalised education, particularly at post secondary school level. This means that in effect, not all girls experience equality in participation as compared to boys.

3. SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND FINANCIAL BARRIERS FACED BY FEMALE CHILDREN THAT PREVENT THEM FROM RECEIVING FORMAL EDUCATION.

As seen in the above discussion, the rate of enrolment of girls into primary schools is almost the same as boys. However, there is a significant drop-out rate seen from post-primary education and onwards, especially in the number of girls. Research suggests that Ni-Vanuatu female children and adolescents are still subject to social, cultural and financial barriers that hinder their enrolment and participation in formal education. Some reasons depict why female children drop-out from schools thus preventing their continuation at school and some reasons are seen to prevent female children from attending school. This section also addresses some government created problems that prevent children from attending schools. The following discussion highlights these barriers in turn where in most situations there is an overlap between them.

The traditional belief in Ni-Vanuatu society today is that women's place is in the home. For this reason traditional education is provided in the form of training of young women and girls are around the household. Girls are trained by their mothers and grandmothers, in the roles they will perform throughout their lives. Training involves weaving of baskets and mats for family and ceremonial use and food preparation. The mother and grandmother will then further advise the girls on their responsibilities towards their families, communities, relationships with other families, respect for family members and elders in the community and rules of the village enforced by the chiefs.⁴⁶ The 1998 Situation Analysis of Children and Women conducted by the Government of Vanuatu and UNICEF quotes the late Grace Molisa in describing the range of roles and responsibilities of traditional Ni-Vanuatu women –

*'... Expected to be industrious, obedient, loyal, submissive, their investment in life and the future is having children, raising a family, and striving to give them a reasonable standard of welfare and prosperity...'*⁴⁷

Women are also involved in domesticated agricultural duties as is required from their subsistent lifestyles. Households in both rural areas (99%) and urban centres (71%) grow their own food.⁴⁸ Agricultural duties include working in the gardens (involving tending, clearing, planting and weeding) and feeding the family's animals. Young girls are typically out in domestic and agricultural chores for long hours as soon as they are physically able to do so, having less time to concentrate on a career. As a result they are withdrawn from school once they reach puberty or are less likely to attend school, leaving boys to continue with their education.

One social aspect acting as a barrier for girls is teenage pregnancy. Early adolescent sexual activities leading to teenage pregnancies are seen to be one of the major reasons for school drop-outs amongst female children in Vanuatu. The rate for teenage pregnancies in Vanuatu is high compared to other Pacific Island countries. Studies indicate that an estimated 81 per 1000 women in the age group of 15-19 years is found to be pregnant. From 2001-2002, 12-15% of all bookings at the Vila Central Hospital antenatal clinic were for teenage girls. Some

were found to be as young as 12.⁴⁹ Adolescents are found to be less likely to practise safe sex or use contraception due to limited knowledge and guidance. There is also a local mentality that family planning is only meant for married people with families and that there is an element of shame attached to asking for contraceptives from hospitals, which are the main source of contraception. A study of youths in Port Vila in 1998 reported 40% of young women were not using any type of contraception.⁵⁰ Field research conducted by the Young People's Project in Vanuatu, identified respondents who stated that they dropped out of school because they became pregnant.⁵¹ For these girls, in the absence of bright job prospects, having a child created meaning in their lives,⁵² thus they were accepting their position of being mothers and adapting to the roles of parenting.

Customarily, children are expected to provide security to parents in their old age and fulfil community obligations through marriage.⁵³ This is especially expected from girls in arranged customary marriages. Customary practices usually accept that a girl is ready for marriage and sex when she attains her puberty. Early marriage therefore, encourages teenage pregnancies. However, pre-marital sex is considered wrong by custom and by the church.⁵⁴ Once an unmarried girl becomes pregnant, it is considered shameful for the girl and her family to return to school as this would expose the family in the social sphere. It can be seen that a female child can be caught in customary practices which, in a way, encourages teenage pregnancies within legitimate marriages, and also increases social stigmatisation from an illegitimate pregnancy.

Research conducted in both the *Initial Report to the Committee for CEDAW and The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl Child Situation Paper for the Pacific Islands Region* state that with the existing legal pluralism in Vanuatu, there is often conflict between customary law and formal law.⁵⁵ The Constitution recognises the fundamental human rights as well as the rules of customary law.⁵⁶ Customary practices usually require girls available for marriage soon after menstruation begins which is soon after 12 or 13 years of age.⁵⁷ However, the Control of Marriage Act⁵⁸ prescribes the minimum legal age for marriage with parental consent for boys and girls, being 18 years and 16 years respectively. The age difference for boys and girls is discriminatory. Vanuatu's Interpretation Act⁵⁹ considers a person of age under 18 years an infant or a minor. Considering the minimum age for lawful marriage for girls is at the age of 16, this would be contradictory to principles of common law which prohibit minors to engage in legally effective transactions, including marriage.⁶⁰ Such legal provisions allow for the early marriage of girls which prevent them from continuing with higher levels of education. Parents encourage early marriage of their daughters mainly for daughters' protection, family honour and social obligation. Parents also fear that formal education will encourage teenage girls to resist marriage arrangements made by them.⁶¹

Research suggests that the risk of sexual abuse in schools is also prominent in Vanuatu.⁶² Sexual abuse cases in Vanuatu are intermittently reported as the preservation of a culture of silence for such matters is highly observed.⁶³ Parents fear for the safety of girls at school and once a girl attains puberty, the child is withdrawn from school. Such is prominent with girls in secondary school. This is due to the parental concerns that the female child will be highly susceptible to sexual harassment or abuse by teachers and male students. Another similar situation raising the risk of girls being sexually harassed or abused is while travelling to and from school. Schools are mainly situated a long distance from the homes of students. Due to this many parents fear that girls are at a risk of such violence from passers-by.⁶⁴ Most primary schools in Vanuatu are located in the rural areas⁶⁵ which require most children from

rural areas and outer islands to travel to the urban centres to complete their secondary and tertiary education. When female children become subject to inter-island migration for such purposes they reside in either boarding facilities or are most often required to reside with extended family members. Here, girls tend to be vulnerable to sexual abuse by male members of the extended family.⁶⁶ Consequently, parents fear the risk of girls being abused by family members.

These risks often lead to parents removing their female children from school and also are reluctant to send them back to school. Removing girls from secondary school result in these girls having fewer employable skills and fewer alternatives after having left school. Should they not find suitable employment within the already limited job opportunities to generate income, there is the greater social risk of these girls being drawn into prostitution.⁶⁷

A further social aspect affecting the enrolment and participation of girls in formalised education is the fact that parents lack the initiative to prioritise education for female children. Due to limited financial and human resources, education in Vanuatu is neither free nor compulsory.⁶⁸ According to research conducted in the Education Master Plan 2000-2010 (1999) prepared by the World Bank,⁶⁹ due to this legal status to the accessibility of education to children along with traditional Ni-Vanuatu beliefs that a woman's place is in the home, parents prioritise male children to receive education. Due to the patrilineal marriage custom in Vanuatu, girls leave their parent's house after marriage and become part of her husband's family.⁷⁰ Many families consider girls to be 'lost' out of the family and would rather spend money on their son's education than the daughter's.⁷¹ Spending money on their education is considered an expense when they could be utilised as extra pair of hands in domestic and agricultural duties in the household. Male children are considered to be assets to the family who will be a support to their parents during their elderly age, and so spending money on their education is considered worthwhile.⁷² This is seen to be one of the key reasons for a smaller percentage of girls to proceed on to each higher level of education with the rate of drop-outs being particularly great for those who continue on to the highest levels of secondary education and to tertiary education.⁷³ As education is not compulsory for children, most parents lack the incentive to send their female children to school.

It is also quite common that the male parent does not prioritise the education of children, especially female children. This is seen when the money spent on the education of female children could rather avail him of opportunities to drink at the kava bar.⁷⁴ In majority of Ni-Vanuatu households, males are mainly heads of the household. Studies have identified many cases where the father spends most of the household income on kava, leaving very little money to spend on food and school fees. Mothers on the other hand tend to be more cautious on household expenditure and prioritise the essentials, such as food, health and education.⁷⁵ It is even more beneficial if mothers are literate. A literate person (adult) is more likely to be conscious about the wellbeing and development of his or her children, family, self and community than an illiterate person. Mothers who are literate tend to value education of their own children. Research suggests that an estimated 69% children aged 6 years whose mothers have secondary level of education, attend the first grade while only half of the children of same age whose mothers are illiterate, attended primary school.⁷⁶

Although there are many parents who would like to send their children to school, they are financially incapable of doing so. Due to the financial constraints in many households and due to the cultural perspective on investing in the male child's future, if there is enough flow of income for the education of only one child, it is more than likely that it will be the boy.

Previously, education was not free in Vanuatu and is quite expensive ranging from 5,000 VT for pre-school education to 75,000 VT in secondary schools.⁷⁷ Countering this problem, the Government of Vanuatu has introduced a policy for free education under its Education Road Map for all children in primary school, effective as of 2010.⁷⁸ Although fees in primary school are free, parents have to pay contributing fees along with other expenditure such as initial registration fees and caution fees, transport (often to other islands), school uniforms, or contributions towards fund-raising activities.⁷⁹ Many households in Vanuatu survive on subsistence living by having their own food gardens and fishing. In 1999, out of 92.6% of overall households in Vanuatu who have their own food garden, 69% used them for subsistence living, 23.3 % used them for subsistence and sale and only 0.2% used them for sale.⁸⁰ This indicated that there is very little cash in the household to spend on children's education.

Using the 1998 Household Income and Expenditure Survey data, the National Statistics Office produced a report in 2002 which indicated that 7% of the population were living under the \$US1 per day. However, the recent Asian Development Bank (ADB) publication stated that 40% of all Ni-Vanuatu and 51% of those living in the rural areas have incomes below the poverty line of US\$1 per day.⁸¹ Due to such circumstances, parents are unwilling to pay for school fees and would rather use female children as extra pair of hands, contributing to their subsistence living arrangements.

4. WAYS FORWARD

As discussed, having such underlying problems cause a hindrance to the enrolment rates of girls into schools throughout Vanuatu. Even though Vanuatu has progressed exceptionally towards alleviating the matter of enrolment, much more can be done to eradicate this concern. Current policies developed by the Government are well underway addressing social, cultural and financial concerns of familial units as well as some problems with the education sector in trying to correlate with the growing populace of Vanuatu. Further recommendations can be adopted from globally introduced implementations which are deemed favourable to national circumstances.

The foremost approach the Government of Vanuatu can take is to make legislative reform in making education compulsory, at least for the first 15 years of a child's education. This approach is found in the Fiji Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Niue.⁸² Making such a change will guarantee the responsibility of parents stated under Vanuatu's Education Act⁸³ to ensure that their children attend school. Free education is a necessary policy to complement compulsory education.

Secondly, reducing the burden of costs incurred from the formal education of their children for families can also prove to be a relief for the issue of non-participation of girls. Many Asian countries have made school fees free of cost or have exempted the payment of fees for children from low income backgrounds. Some have provided free school uniforms and text books. Such an incentive from government would encourage parents to send their daughters to school. It would also resolve to some extent the disadvantaged situation of girls in households which give priority to educating boys when financial constraints allow for the education of only one child.⁸⁴

Thirdly, a national committee involving both government and civil societies to promote the advancement of female children was appointed in Vanuatu.⁸⁵ The National Children's Committee (NCC) is a step forward to ensuring a more coordinated approach to bring into effect and monitor national commitments. With the appointment of the NCC in Vanuatu, the

enforcement of the rights of female children in accordance with the CRC is mandated in its processes. Responsibilities include the advocacy of child rights on the behalf of children, developing strategies to better address the surrounding issues in child right matters, implementation of the CRC, working with government in legislative reform to ensure that laws are made in coordination with the CRC.⁸⁶ The NCC has incorporated into their annual business plans, activities and initiatives that are practical and far-reaching with the implementation of the CRC. Efforts to engage communities about child rights are ongoing indirectly through many activities.⁸⁷

It can further be suggested that raising awareness on the issues of rights and the importance of education for girls through community based interventions, would lead to the effect of promoting the compliance of international standards on the rights of female children. Community based programs would include the likes of training in parenting-skills, education in child development, and education on the prevention of the vulnerability of girls through social and cultural practises.⁸⁸

Donor assistance and the support of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) can be the main agents for development and change in Vanuatu in areas of child development in education.⁸⁹ Vanuatu's NGO community has been skilful and dedicated in supporting the NCC, raising awareness in communities on the issue surrounding the rights of children, training school drop-outs in life skills, pre-schools, community development and small scale income generation, amongst other things.⁹⁰ Donor support can provide for financial assistance in resource management in the education sector. Assistance can be provided for funding future projects, such as the expansion and construction of more schools and also for the allocation of funds in the education sector.

Current practices in Nepal provide suitable practices that can be adopted in Vanuatu.⁹¹ They include the likes of a launch in publicity campaigns involving the use of mass media and audio-visual aids to create a favourable environment for girls' education targeting rural families; Advocacy and awareness programmes critical of early marriage and other negative social practices; and making parents aware of their responsibility to ensure that their female children complete primary education. Communal participation in such programs could be advantageous by better understanding the importance of female children receiving education, and also by not perceiving it as an expense but rather as an investment for the child and her familial unit. By placing the community at the centre of planning and action, a sense of ownership and accountability is created among parents, who utilize the facilities fully and effectively. It also assures parents that their girl children are in safe hands.⁹²

Finally, in Vanuatu, the main obstacle preventing most children from progressing to higher levels of education is the lack of places in secondary schools to accommodate for all children who complete primary education.⁹³ This is due to the lack of secondary schools and due to the rapid increase in population growth. For example, of 100 children enrolled in Grade 1 only 35 continue to lower secondary level and less than 7% access Grade 11.⁹⁴ There are many more young people who want to continue to secondary level than there are places available. This in effect heightens the drop-out rate. The main reason for this is due to the lack of availability of land around Vanuatu for the construction of physical structures.⁹⁵ Whilst this issue affects both male and female children, it affects girls more as this the issue is linked with the lack of available physical structures and safe environment to house female children who are inter-island migrants.

In order to overcome this problem, Vanuatu may wish to examine the experience of the State of Madhya Pradesh in India, where there has been the introduction of the Education Guarantee Scheme. The scheme addresses the issue of lack of schools and thus building new structures with trained teachers in locations that are safe enough for girls to walk to. This has in effect brought schools closer to habitations and has been successful in increasing the rate of enrolment and eliminating the non-participation of girls in rural and remote areas. It has also brought schools closer to home bringing confidence into the parents of female children who otherwise feared of their child's safety while travelling to school and also reduced the need for rural-urban migration.⁹⁶

A similar tactic has already been identified as a possible solution in Vanuatu, where same-island schooling was mentioned as a solution to keep children close to their homes and communities.⁹⁷ This prevents the need for girls to travel to urban centres to receive higher education and also relieved parents from the fear of risks pertaining to such migration by their female children. One other advantage of same island schooling is that the culture can be studied in its own context.⁹⁸ The culture of a certain community can be incorporated into learning and thus this challenges the opposition to formal education where some question its relevance.⁹⁹ This would in effect increase gender equity in schools and an increased number of female children would be able to receive higher formal education.

As mentioned earlier there is a risk of sexual abuse of girls while travelling to school and when girls travel from outer islands to urban centres. Such an approach can be implemented in Vanuatu by building boarding structures with a safe female friendly environment to address the issue of girls being subject to risks of sexual abuse. There also is also a need for increased and better management of funding in the Education Sector so as to accommodate the demands of the growing young populace in Vanuatu.

However, given the lack of financial and human resources it is unrealistic to expect all these areas to be targeted and, given the financial constraints such initiatives would need to be donor funded.¹⁰⁰ At 2002, government allocation in the national recurrent budget for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports amounted to 25% of the overall budget. Since 50% of Vanuatu's population comprises of school-aged persons, such an allocation becomes insufficient to fund the existing education structure or to reform the education system.¹⁰¹ Therefore government's plans to fund for such improvements in the education system become increasingly pressurised. In addition to providing universal free education, there will be a need to accommodate 17,600 primary school students and 996 trained primary school teachers, by 2010. Remuneration is estimated to account at 639.7 million ^{vatu} along with new buildings and renovations.¹⁰²

However, studies identify that even without Government's restrictive financial resources to implements these plans there are other concerns that hinder the enrolment rates of girls into formalised education.

The Government of Vanuatu has attained quite an achievement in the area of reducing the gender parity gap in national enrolment rates between female and male children, over the past twenty years. However, much more attention is needed, particularly, in developing a focus on the social, cultural and financial barriers that female children face, which alleviates them of such hindrances and achieves a deeper and more communally recognized sense of gender equity, as compared to equality established on paper. Strategic goals and directions for accelerating gender equality in education also require the inclusion of the emphasis on

monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of possible interventions as well as their impact on the greater community in the near future.

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