

## V.

### BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES:

## *Why Fewer Girls?*

Girls often have higher dropout rates than boys for many reasons: household responsibilities; child labor; higher opportunity cost to the family; long distances to schools from girls' homes; early marriage and/or pregnancy; the threat of sexual harassment and violence in school and en route to school; lack of girl-friendly facilities (no latrines, no running water), a particularly serious problem during menstruation; gender discriminatory teaching and learning methods; and parents and communities who are not aware of the value of education for girls.

#### **The economics of enrollment: “She doesn’t have the money to go to secondary school. There are so many like her.”**

The relationship between poverty and enrollment and retention is pronounced at the secondary school level. In sub-Saharan Africa and in some South Asian countries where families are often very large and very poor, poverty is a major factor forcing families to make choices about whom to send to school, often at the expense of the girls. In particular, the need for the free labor of children, prohibitive school fees (in some countries the equivalent of four months of income for a poor family), in addition to costs such as text books, school supplies, and uniforms, prevent students from enrolling or result in them dropping out.

Girls suffer from these realities more than boys because of the opportunity costs associated with educating them. In most developing countries, girls are expected to work more than boys, and as girls are the ones who look after younger siblings, care for the household, work in agricultural fields, and sell goods at the market, the costs for educating them are actually more than the costs for educating boys.

Parents recognize that the cost of educating a girl is not just the cost of tuition, it is also the cost of the loss of her labor. Poverty, then, is clearly interrelated with child labor; therefore, one of the most common reasons for children, especially girls, not to attend school is that their families need them to work. With the growing inflation in many developing countries, poor families are forced to involve all members in the income-generating activities, including children, in order to cope and manage their daily lives. "In Pakistan, in cases of extreme poverty, children may contribute up to 40 percent of family income for their survival. When there is matter of contribution towards family income, the rights of children are equally violated. There are certain activities for girls and boys separately, through which they contribute to family's economy. Girls in most parts of rural Pakistan are mainly involved in agricultural-related activities, taking meals to working elders in the field and looking after their younger siblings in case their mothers are also busy in agriculture work."<sup>28</sup>

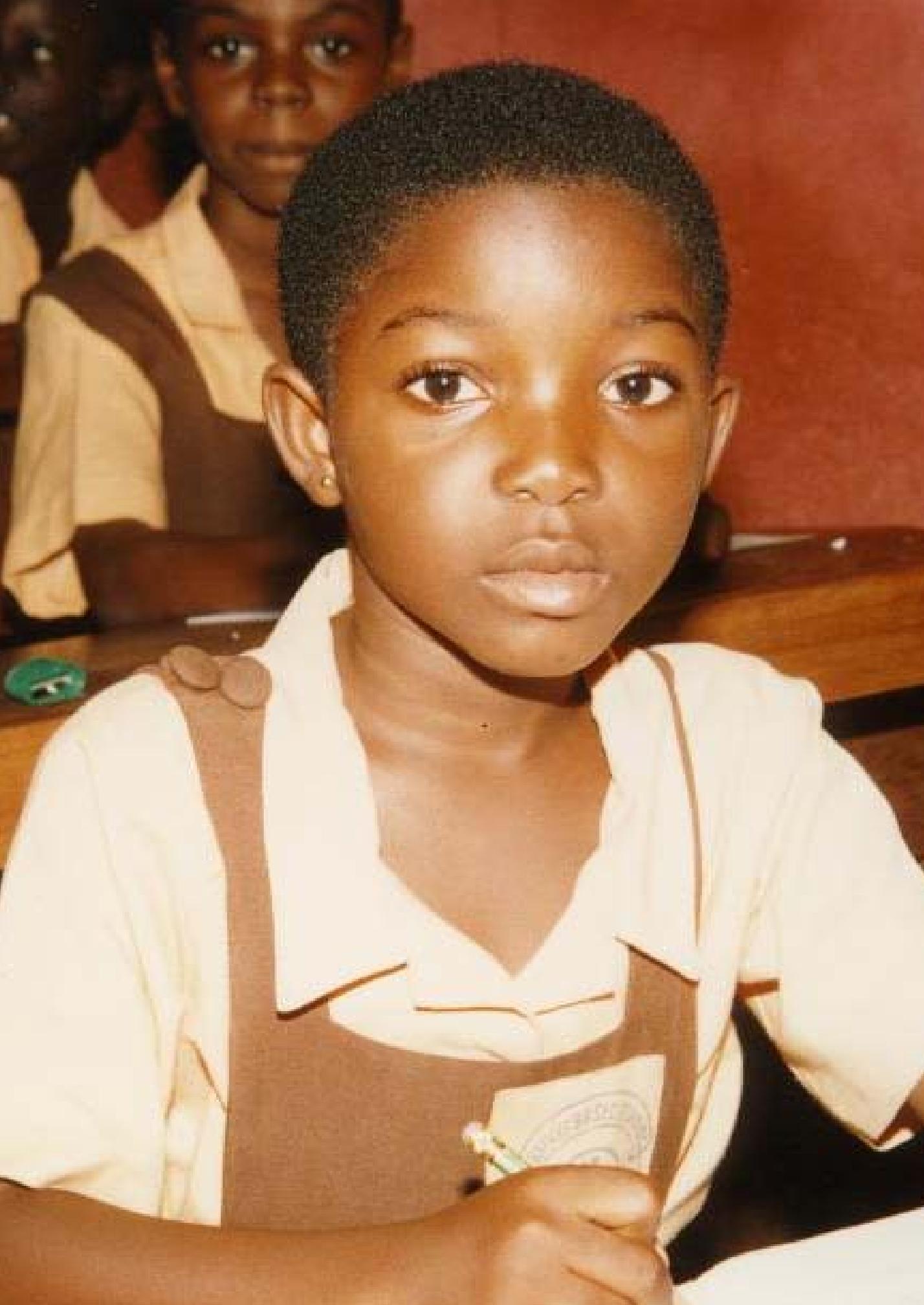
Lastly, families are more likely to view the education of a girl not as an investment, but as a loss or, at best, an investment in someone else's family. In Africa and other developing nations, women marry into and then care for their new family, while men are expected to care for and support their own parents and immediate family. In Guatemala, for example, The Population Council found that, "Early marriage did not appear to directly affect female enrollment, but related qualitative findings indicate that Mayan parents' expectations of daughters' future roles may reduce parental incentives to invest in education beyond the age of puberty."<sup>29</sup>

People pursue an education for economic reasons. Graduate school in the United States and Europe is too expensive for students to attend just for fun. They make the investment in expectation of a high return in salary and job quality. Trends in the developing world are no exception. Families and nations make significant financial investments — whether in education or otherwise — because they expect them to pay off.

---

<sup>28</sup> Pirzado, Parvez, and Saeed Nasim. "Developing Leaders of Education in Thar Desert Area, Pakistan." Paper presented at 8th Global Leadership Forum, Istanbul, Turkey. The Agha Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, June 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Hallman, Perraca, Catino, and Marta Ruiz. "Working Paper: Multiple Disadvantages of Mayan Females: The Effects of Gender, Ethnicity, Poverty, and Residence on Education in Guatemala." Population Council: Policy Research Division, 2006. Last accessed 15 June 2006. <http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/wp/211.pdf>.



The economics of enrollment are therefore likely the primary determinant of whether a child, and particularly a girl, will be educated. In turn, this likely has an influence on other existing barriers to education. This unfortunate reality was noted in Malawi, where a recent *Christian Science Monitor* article on girls' secondary education states, "The dropout rate is high — not because of a lack of ambition, but of funds. Of the 100 who showed up on the first day of ninth grade, teachers have had to chase away about 70 for nonpayment of fees. Annual tuition is just \$29. But the school is stretched too thin, teachers say, to provide educational charity."<sup>30</sup> Likewise in Kenya, a 14-year old AIDS orphan, Maureen Akinyi, who is now second in a class of 75 students, has a teacher who explains to the *French Press Agency*, "We can take care of her in primary school, but what next? She doesn't have the money to go to secondary school. There are so many like her."<sup>31</sup>

**Key to access: Location, location, location**

Location and accessibility of schools also play a significant role in a child's ability to attend school. For many children, particularly throughout Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East, the picture is bleak and worsens as students advance from the primary to the secondary level. Independent research conducted by the Academy for Educational Development in 2006 revealed that in the Kindia area, a rural region of Guinea, there were 681 primary schools scattered in the various towns and villages.<sup>32</sup> For those students completing primary school, however, only 41 secondary schools were available to absorb them, meaning there would not be enough available seats and many students would have to travel great distances or board in order to attend school.

These statistics are, unfortunately, the norm in many rural communities in developing countries. The realities in Uganda, offered below, are similar to those in a number of African, South Asian, and Middle Eastern countries, including Mali, Guinea, Pakistan, India, and Yemen.

---

<sup>30</sup> McLaughlin, Abraham. "Monitor Readers Send Six African Girls to High School," *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 7, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Debut, Beatrice. "Africa Struggles with Free Primary Education," *Agence France-Press*, 15 April 2006. Last accessed 22 May 2006. <http://www.aegis.com/news/afp/2006/AF060427.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Balde, Aissatou. Research for the Academy for Educational Development, Washington, DC, Spring, 2006.

The problem is not just the limited number of schools but also access to secondary education by various sections of society. People living in and around Kampala, the capital, and other urban centers have much easier access to secondary education than those in the countryside. Only 6 percent of children of the poorest 25 percent of families complete secondary education, compared with 22 percent from the richest 25 percent. The government is seeking to address such geographical and social imbalances. 'We are aiming to have at least one government-aided secondary school in each sub-county,' says Mr. Nsubuga. Out of about 900 sub-counties, 428 currently are without government-aided schools. Of Uganda's 45 districts, 15 have been identified as the most 'educationally disadvantaged,' accounting for less than a fifth of gross national enrollment. They will receive special attention, with a greater share of educational resources channeled to them and private funders given more incentives to invest.<sup>33</sup>

Distance from school is a significant obstacle for many children and tends to affect girls more than boys. Economic and safety concerns make parents reluctant to send girls to boarding schools or let them walk long distances to day schools.

Parents may be forced to pay for transportation for a girl for safety reasons in cases where they would feel comfortable allowing their son to walk to school. In certain countries it is not as acceptable for a girl to ride a bicycle to school as it is for a boy. The distance between home and the secondary school becomes even more of a problem for girls, especially in rural areas, where middle and upper secondary schools are more likely to be distant from small villages. Because schooling is often more rare for girls, they are more likely to be walking to school alone or in smaller groups than boys who may have a wider peer network. While walking long distances, often through remote fields and forests away from the main thoroughfares, girls are more susceptible to sexual harassment and other forms of violence than boys, making parents cautious. In many cases, it is often deemed appropriate for girls to be accompanied by a parent or relative if the school is far from the village. In a family where this resource is not available because all adults are needed to work, this may pose an additional challenge, and this challenge is likely to increase with AIDS taking its toll on adults in Africa and Asia. Distance to lower and upper secondary school is one of the major deterrents for girls' attendance, survival, and completion of the secondary cycle in the rural areas of countries such as Egypt, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Pakistan, and Yemen.

---

33 Kirungi, Fred. "Uganda Tackling School Bottlenecks." Africa Recovery Online: A United Nations Publication. Last accessed 15 June 2006. <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/vol14no2/uganda.htm>.

Responses to changes in travel time or distance to schools might differ by gender even if the impacts of a change in monetary costs, e.g., a fee reduction, would not. Having a school in closer proximity thus can reduce the costs of girls' school attendance while having little or no effect on costs for boys.<sup>34</sup>

### **The success cycle and its impact on retention**

In countries where schooling is not mandatory and where beginning with the first grade carries significant financial costs, the inclination to continue to send a child to school is at least partially fueled by the child's ongoing performance. In families that cannot afford to educate all their children, the one or two children most likely to succeed at school or the best-performing children are the only ones allowed to continue. When girls must walk to distant schools after doing house chores, while boys can ride, their performance often suffers due to frequent absences or lateness, hunger, fatigue, or bad weather.

These factors combined, therefore, take on even greater importance when parents are faced with the question, "Then what?" as they often are when they consider whether to continue to send their child to school. Where the economic and social benefits of primary education—literacy, math skills, better economic earning potential, increased health benefits for families—are not always immediately tangible, and where education is viewed not as a right or obvious given but as an economic investment, whether a child will succeed, with great certainty, can play a significant role in determining whether education is viewed as valuable and worthwhile.

### **The quality and relevance factor**

Success and retention in secondary school are even more directly tied to the quality and relevance of education than in primary schools.

The 2006 EFA Conference on Business and Education reports that, "...not all children who enter school leave with the same quality of learning. In fact, the difference between highest and lowest quality of learning can vary by a factor of three. Some of that variation is a result of differences between schools; some of it is determined by the children's background and health...A 2004 study by Crouch and Fasih found that learning scores are positively correlated with income and parental education, and negatively correlated with the percentage of children in the population...In other words, countries with higher income,

---

<sup>34</sup> Glick, Peter. "Policy Impacts on Schooling Gender Gaps in Developing Countries: The Evidence and a Framework for Interpretation." Cornell University, February 2006. Last accessed 22 May 2006. <http://www.cfnpp.cornell.edu/images/wp196.pdf>.

higher adult education, and lower percentages of children in the population tend to have higher learning scores.”<sup>35</sup>

Those who are not engaged in learning or who are not participating actively in class will often be the students to drop out. Also, those who cannot afford the textbooks and notebooks to enable them to succeed and those who do not see the relevance of what they are learning and how their daily lives can benefit from the material they are learning also will drop out. Boys and girls may suffer from low learning if the quality and relevance of education and teaching is poor, but girls tend to suffer more because of an ingrained gender bias.

Whether or not girls are exposed to female teachers who can serve as role models is one of the greatest quality indicators. Female teachers are less likely to have gender biases against girls and are far less likely to sexually harass or otherwise demean their female students. Parents also may not be comfortable having their child taught by a man in certain traditional rural regions. The lack of female teachers in a school is a missed opportunity to provide meaningful professional female role models to young women and men on a daily basis. Countries that need more female teachers at the secondary level include Bangladesh, Egypt, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, Pakistan, and Yemen. The International Food Policy Research Institute has found, for instance, that:

The detailed analysis of the impact of school characteristics on primary school enrollment in rural Mozambique indicates that dimensions of school quality, access or availability, and efficiency all work to stimulate enrollment, although the effects are small and differ somewhat by gender of child...but it is the gender composition of the teaching staff that is even more important in determining the household decision to send children to school. Both the simple proportion of teachers who are female, as well as the share of trained female teachers among all teachers are important positive determinants of enrollment rates. Raising the proportion of female teachers from 0.37 to 0.50 in the administrative post will raise enrollment rates by roughly 5 percentage points.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Ingram, Wils, Carrol, and Felicity Townsend. “The Untapped Opportunity: How Public-Private Partnerships can Advance Education for All.” The Academy for Educational Development, Washington, DC, August 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Handa, Sudhanshu. “Raising Primary School Enrollment in Development Countries: the Relative Importance of Supply and Demand.” IFPRI, November 1999. Last accessed 22 May 2006. <http://www.ifpri.org/divs/fcnd/dp/papers/dp76.pdf>.



Unfortunately, exposure to female teachers dramatically decreases for girls as they move into secondary school. In Guinea's Kindia region, there are 956 female primary school teachers out of a total of 2,971, already a low ratio. In secondary schools in the same region, however, there are only 29 female teachers out of 658 total teachers. In Mali's Segou region, the picture is similar. In primary schools, there are 646 female teachers out of a total of 1,808 teachers. At the secondary level, 159 of 799 teachers are female.

### **School corruption: It is not just about money**

A 10-country study of classroom corruption by Transparency International has found that some of the most common forms of corruption are those that could be alleviated or prevented through greater parental and student empowerment at the local school level, such as the following:

Parents may be 'advised' to pay for private tutoring in which the teacher, after official school hours, teaches their child the essentials of the curriculum; and parents may be asked to contribute 'voluntary' donations for school infrastructure or extra-curricular activities. Failure to do so might result for example in schools withholding students' records or report cards.<sup>37</sup>

Another form of corruption in certain schools is an inappropriate and inequitable form of child labor among students in order to perform work at school that the school cannot otherwise afford. The report explains:

In extremely under-funded environments, school children may be exploited as unpaid labor to compensate for teachers' or administrators' meager income, or as a direct contribution to the school's budget.<sup>38</sup>

Often, the most exploited in these situations are girls because social and cultural norms allocate the distribution of domestic chores—cooking, cleaning, gardening, etc.—to girls. Further, because girls' presence in the classroom is not honored as a "right" or the norm in many school environments, it is often girls who will be pulled from class to assist with cooking for school functions, getting breakfast or lunch for teachers, running errands, cleaning the school yard, etc. Mercy Tembon, the World Bank's focal point for girls' education in the Human Development Network, explains, "Enrollment isn't the only issue adversely affected by discrimination...What girls are actually learning in school needs equal attention...In some countries, girls are given the janitorial work in

<sup>37</sup> Meier, Bettina, and Michael Griffin. "Stealing the Future: Corruption in the Classroom: Ten Real World Experiences." Transparency International, 2005. Last accessed 19 May 2006. <http://www.pambazuka.org/index.php?id=31091>.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

schools, while the boys are outside playing.”<sup>39</sup> This has a detrimental impact not only on girls’ school performance but also on their career expectations. Such practices in the schools not only shortens the time of girls in the classroom but also affects their morale, as the message sent is that they are more valued as servants than as students. It also makes them vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse when students attend to teachers at home. The combined impact of all of these forms of corruption is significant and extends beyond the classroom. Transparency International reports:

Corruption in education can have a devastating effect on a country’s well being. Its costs - illegal fees and bribes for admission, examination, or tuition — are a heavy burden for poor parents. Corruption...is a strain on the education budget and deprives students of the materials and learning environment they need... Students who manage to proceed with their education, despite these disadvantages, may be poorly skilled and thus add less value to the economy and public sector during their professional life. Perhaps the highest cost of corruption in education is loss of trust. If people (especially the young) come to believe that school or university admission and marks can be bought, a country’s economic and political future is in jeopardy. The education sector — rightfully — is expected to be fair and impartial. School should transmit concepts of political representation, human rights, solidarity, and the public good. Corrupt practices at schools and universities directly contradict these concepts, destroying the trust that is necessary to the development of communities.<sup>40</sup>

Among corruption’s other consequences, destruction of trust takes a significant toll not only on a community or country’s political and social fabric but also on shutting women out of systems and institutions they should be able to turn to for assistance. From health centers and their children’s school principal’s office to ministry offices, women are less likely to approach necessary resources if they learned at a young age that they will not be treated fairly or with respect. Whether a real or perceived injustice, this, combined with a lack of economic resources, advanced literacy, and successful female role models, is an unnecessary disadvantage with which to saddle young women.

---

39 World Bank. “Engendering Change in the Classroom.” November 11, 2004. Last accessed 22 May 2006. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTEDUCATION/0,,contentMDK:20279910~menuPK:617572~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:282386,00.html>.

40 Meier, Bettina and Michael Griffin. “Stealing the Future: Corruption in the Classroom: Ten Real World Experiences.” Transparency International, 2005. Last accessed 19 May 2006. <http://www.pambazuka.org/index.php?id=31091>.