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WEBINAR

DE/RECONSTRUCTING EDUCATION AS A SPACE FOR TRANSFORMATIVE BELONGING AND
AGENCY

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Brahima Coulibaly [00:00:44] Good morning, everyone. My name is Brahima Coulibaly, I am the vice president of the Global Economy and Development program at Brookings. It gives me a great pleasure to welcome you all to this plenary conversation, which kicks off the Center for Universal Education's Research and Policy Symposium on Gender Equality In and Through Education, which will be held over the next three days. As the world continues to grapple with and understand the scope of the impact of the COVID pandemic, evidence continues to emerge in the education sector about the breadth and depth of so-called learning loss, especially in math and literacy, and around the crisis of young people's well-being and social emotional development. At the heart of the discussion is the recognition of the importance of young people to have access to education spaces and opportunities that nurture their well-being and within which they can develop a range of skills needed to participate and thrive.

Yet, even before the COVID 19 pandemic, socio-economic inequalities excluded millions of our children from such opportunities, both within and outside of classrooms, especially girls and young women living in poverty. To develop their holistic skills that support them in life, work and citizenship, education system must provide young people with a sense of belonging and connection that allows them to identify and voice their hopes, make decisions, and take actions to shape their own lives and the lives of their communities. In this plenary conversation, the 2022 Echidna scholars, global scholars Halimatou Hima from Niger, Bhawana Shrestha from Nepal, Anthony Luvanda from Kenya, and Hina Saleem from Pakistan will share lessons from their research over the past six months that looks at how to de- and reconstruct education systems, schools and other learning contexts to create spaces for inclusive and transformative belonging for all young people.

For those who are not familiar with the Echidna Global Scholars Program at Brookings, it is a six months visiting fellowship that supports emerging leaders in gender equality and education from the Global South. During the fellowship, they pursue individual research, focus on improving learning opportunities and life outcomes for girls and young women in their home countries and bring those learnings to bear regionally and globally. We have been really fortunate to have an excellent cohort of talented young scholars who bring a diversity of backgrounds and a richness of perspectives.

From gender transformative, social, emotional learning for adolescent girls and their teachers in Nepal to learning continuity for children, possibly on the move in the Sahel, an inclusive, responsive education policy for rural girls not in school in Pakistan, and holistic policy to bridge the gender gap in

the rapidly expanding digital economy of Kenya. I look forward to a fascinating conversation, which will be moderated by my colleague Jennifer O'Donoghue who is a senior fellow and deputy director of our Center for Universal Education. She also coordinates our Echidna Global Scholars Program and leads our work on gender and education more broadly. Jen. I now turn it over to you.

Jennnifer O'Donoghue [00:04:29] Thank you, Coul, for that warm welcome for your continued support of the Echidna Scholars Program and for laying out the focus of our conversation today. Welcome again, everyone. I'm so glad you could join us for what we hope will be an engaging and thought-provoking conversation with the 2022 Echidna global scholars. Throughout this discussion, we invite you to share your questions and comments on Twitter using the hashtag Echidna scholars or to email them to us at events at Brookings dot edu.

And we now turn to our panel conversation with the 2022 Echidna global scholars. Joining us today is Halimatou Hima, currently senior fragility specialist for coastal West Africa at the World Bank. Halima has worked extensively in the social and economic development sectors in Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Burkina Faso, among other contexts. As minister counselor at the Permanent Mission of Niger to the United Nations, she was the principal negotiator on the landmark Security Council resolution on the Protection of education in Armed Conflict. Halima holds a Ph.D. in development studies from the University of Cambridge and a master's in public policy from Harvard. Welcome, Halima. Good to see you.

Our second scholar is Anthony Luvanda. Anthony, if you want to join us on screen, that would be great. Anthony is an active player in the Kenyan entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem who dedicates himself to empowering youth and entrepreneurship and reducing gender disparities within digital technology. He is co-founder and executive director of Magharibi Innovation Hub and a founding member of the Association of Countrywide Innovation Hubs, as well as a senior lecturer in the IT department at the National Defense University, Kenya. Tony holds a Ph.D. in information technology from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, and a master's in computer-based information systems from the University of Sunderland. Good to have you here with us, Tony.

Anthony Luvanda [00:06:16] Thank you.

Jennnifer O'Donoghue [00:06:17] Also with us today is Hina Saleem, deeply interested in researching and designing contextualized gender responsive education programs informed by rural

communities, Hina spearheaded the development and implementation of the Citizen Foundation's first community led literacy and life skills program for out-of-school children in rural areas of Pakistan. Prior to joining TCF, Hina conducted research on teacher training with the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education and spent several years teaching in public schools with Teach for Pakistan. Hina has a master's in international education policy from Harvard and a master's in finance from the Institute of Business Administration in Karachi. Welcome, Hina.

And rounding out our 2022 cohort of Echidna global scholars is Bhawana Shrestha, co-founder of the organization My Emotions Matter. Bhawana is a redemptive storyteller and an educator dedicated to helping individuals and teams develop the mindset and skills for emotional intelligence. A faculty member at King's College, Nepal, Bawana leads the office of Safe and Respectable Learning, working to prevent harassment and discrimination and advance equity, diversity, inclusion and social justice. A former Teach for Nepal fellow, Bhawana holds two masters in English from Bukhara, and Tribhuwan universities and is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in educational leadership at Kathmandu University. Welcome Bhawana. I want to thank you all for being here today, as always, and especially as I read out your bios, I am very honored to be in such illustrious company. To start out our conversation, could each of you briefly introduce yourself and the focus of your research and maybe tell us a little bit about how you became interested in this topic? So Anthony, why don't we start with you?

Anthony Luvanda [00:07:57] Thank you very much, Jen, as already mentioned, I work within, under major players within the technical, digital technology environment in Kenya, both in the rural set ups, given that I'm a co-founder of an innovation hub that works towards for studying and imparting digital knowledge to the youth and girls, in particular within rural Kenya, western Kenya, that is. Also I'm a faculty member of the National Defense University, Kenya, which means that I interact a lot with young people within the digital innovation ecosystem and also with regards to the teaching of technology.

Now one thing that is actually has made me really want and really drove me towards wanting to work on gender and digital technology, is the fact that within those environments we find that we rarely get in touch more at in contact with women in the industry, very few of them exist, very few of them hold positions in that industry. And even what really drove me towards this is that even within the classroom environment, within the universities, you find that there are very few girls in the

classrooms learning about these issues raised, most of the management or those in management actually feel like there are other pressing issues that they need to look at as opposed to what we are trying to raise at that particular moment with respect to gender. So that is what actually drove me towards doing that. Thank you.

Bhawana Shrestha [00:09:27] Hi. I'm Bhawana Shrestha. I'm from Nepal. Gender and girls' education has always been the core of my work since early on as I myself have noticed gender-based discrimination while growing up and have seen the impact of systemic gender barriers firsthand. And over the years I have worked with multiple communities where domestic and sexual violence are so common. Then my realization was that the access of education would help bring the systemic change that I am looking for. Then I spent my three years as a teach for Nepal fellow in a rural school of Nepal. That's when my interest in emotional intelligence and social emotional learning stemmed from.

As I started working with adolescents through my organization, I realized how teaching learning is tied up with emotions, especially when their social emotional needs are fulfilled. Working with the schools and the students in all these years, what I realized is that we give a very little space to talk about our emotions and our well-being. So I'm here at Brookings to strengthen my advocacy through evidence-based research and to explore the social emotional needs of adolescent girls in Nepal. And how can that be addressed in a context when the larger socio-cultural problems are still existing?

Halimatou Hima [00:10:55] Thank you so much, Jen, for such a warm introduction. My name is Halimatou Hima. I am from Niger. I am a researcher. I'm a policymaker. And I've worked as a community organizer for several years, predominantly in rural Niger on the question of girls' education. So about ten years ago, when the insecurity in the Sahel began to accelerate, I was working with UNICEF in Niger's northern region of Agadez on supporting children, youth, but also women returning from Libya with re-integration into their home communities. And as I continued my journey later on in international development, I would say many of the questions which took roots in Niger never really left me. I yearn to understand development issues better and to bring value and expertise to the field.

So currently in the Sahel, we have a confluence of crises that are affecting education for millions of children and teachers as well. So when Niger served on the Security Council last year, the government carried this issue as a priority. And I was the lead negotiator and pen holder on the first

Security Council resolution on the protection of education in armed conflict. So in many ways, my research here at Brookings is a continuation of that work, and it seeks to better understand the educational experiences of forcibly displaced children in the central Sahel. I also look at how forced displacement intersects with gender to shift social norms and educational aspirations. And really, having worked with government and navigated the world of development and research, I see the need to create stronger links between research, policy and practice.

Hina Saleem [00:12:49] Really honored to be part of this cohort. I am Hina Saleem, I'm from Pakistan. I started my career in education in 2013 as a middle school teacher for 60 girls as part of Teach for Pakistan. I taught in a government school located in a low-income neighborhood of an urban center, over the years continued working in different areas of education, including teacher training, school improvement and assessments with focus on low-income urban areas. My geographic focus changed when I became part of the Citizens Foundation, where I led the team that designed and piloted an education program for out-of-school children in rural Pakistan in the province of Sindh. The research builds on those three years of work that I did as part of the management team at TCF. It looks at policy responses for bridging the educational opportunity gaps for underserved children, particularly girls in rural Sindh.

This work matters because province of Sindh in Pakistan has the widest gaps in school participation rates between urban and rural areas within Pakistan and lower school participation rates for girls in rural Sind. These gaps have worsened with learning of 1.7 million children interrupted in Sindh alone due to the recent climate intensified floods in Pakistan. The floods have also impacted poverty rates, nutrition and health of children. To arrest these trends that have the potential to lower school participation rates further, this research becomes more important so that efforts to rehabilitate communities and schools consider both the urgent and long-term education needs and aspirations of children.

Jennnifer O'Donoghue [00:14:30] Thank you all. I know it's a challenge, given everything that you've done to introduce yourselves in such a short period of time. But I hope everyone has had a chance to, to really hear and feel the really incredible and deep work that they've all been doing over the past years. And, you Hina, know, you know, you ended talking about aspirations. And I'd like to, to pick up there for our first round of questions here. And, you know, as you all know, the focus of this year's symposium is on transformative belonging. And often when we think about belonging, it's

about belonging to something. And key to this are aspirations, aspirations that can serve as both an entry way of sort into that belonging, but then are also shaped by that sense of belonging.

So I'd love to start this first round of questions, hearing from all of you around what you learned about the aspirations of children, young people, and families who participated in your research. What did they aspire to belong to? What did they imagine for themselves and how did you see those aspirations being shaped? And Bhawana why don't we start with you?

Bhawana Shrestha [00:15:29] Yeah, sure. Thank you very much, Jen. So, as you mentioned, so this question reminds me of one of my focus group discussions with our group of adolescent girls. So a 14-year-old shared that her family sees her differently than her brother. And over time, as she's given less freedom than her brother, her identity has started to shift, and she sees herself as someone who has to continually rely on others and as someone who cannot be independent. So her aspiration simply meant to have that sense of belonging within her family members.

Meanwhile, in the same like focus group discussions and with the same group of other girls, most of the other girls shared that all the different professions that they gather from multiple social media platforms. That was fascinating because for them they were imagining something so different than the stereotypical jobs that their mothers and sisters have been limited to. So the concern that they raised was now even though they do have this aspiration, they don't have the choice to move ahead with that aspiration. And some of and for some of them, even if they choose, they don't have the right resource person to help them garnish their competency, and that's making them feel miserable. So my biggest learning was that as we think of aspiration for our adolescent girls, we also need to think of who is going to help them nurture those aspirations and how.

Anthony Luvanda [00:17:08] Bhawana brings up an important issue with regards to aspiration and professions, because within the school environment, that is where actually this needs to be nurtured and brought about. But you find that young girls and young women don't have that or such kind of aspirations with regard to ICT careers. They do not feel or imagine themselves within ICT. Basically, due to the fact that they know very little about ICT careers and therefore with regard to these aspirations and to make them aspire to this, it is important that we are able to shape those circles, to create more role models, for example. And these role models will expand over years, but in most cases, it is going to be within the schooling environment.

So for us to be able to nurture and for us to be able to actually make them aspire, we need to create a sense of belonging within the schooling environment, not just belonging to the schools, but also belonging to the ICT careers. We need to make them feel that they belong within the digital technology environment, within the digital technology ecosystem, and be able to embrace and learn to be able to learn about digital technology. And this should be done at different points of the educational trajectory, not just at one particular place. And therefore, it's important that we actually create a sense of belonging within schools with regards to ICT careers.

Hina Saleem [00:18:34] Yeah. Hearing Tony and Bhawana talk about gendered aspirations, I saw that in the case of rural Sindh, but from the perspective of families, especially parents. Families value education and want education to lead to professional jobs, but more so in the case of sons and improvement of home environments, more so in the case of daughters. Parents also often quoted less years of schooling for girls compared to boys, when we asked them about the number of years they expect their sons and daughters to study. These aspirations are shaped by social and infrastructural obstacles that become more salient at higher grades of schools, especially for older girls. And even when there is schooling for education to be reconstructed, classroom lessons need to reflect on gender norms and expectations prevalent in the larger society and how they affect lives of women and men and their relationship with each other.

Second important finding around aspirations that I saw was that when parents list professions that school education supports, they do not include rural professions like farming or livestock management. This forces us to reckon with how design a formal education system is itself a structural value, but it's not able to create a sense of belonging and appreciation for all the realities, knowledge and interests. To reconstruct education, researchers, development practitioners and policymakers need to question whose interests and ideologies are represented in the current formal education systems and for an education system and the population that are excluded in the process.

Halimatou Hima [00:20:17] Hina, I couldn't have agreed more with what Hina just said, that centering on excluded population, populations is so critical. And when I look at that, we look at the context of forced displacement, truly, the most transformative and radical way to create a sense of belonging is to ensure, in the very first place that forced displacement does not become synonymous with exclusion from learning. And I think just as what we've seen in the case of Pakistan, when we engage with forcibly displaced community in Nigeria, primarily in the region of Tillaberi, it really

transpired that education is not a second degree want. It is consistently cited as a top priority for forcibly displaced communities. But many, many children and young people are constrained in its pursuit.

And while aspirations for educational pursuits might be high, I think many challenges condition, challenging conditions creates a huge gap between those educational aspirations in terms of what people hope will happen in the future and expectations in terms of what people believe would happen in the future given current realities. So on the notion of belonging, really, given the weight of structural barriers, including high dropout rates that we see, forcibly displaced communities may sometimes be right to contest an educational system that they perceive as barely useful or that they perceive as out of reach. So when I see belonging in this context, it really is about addressing those structural barriers in school on the way to and from school and in the community. So that, for example, a girl in Tadres who wants to become a nurse can become one.

Jennnifer O'Donoghue [00:22:16] Thank you all for that. Halima, I think you lead right into the next question that I wanted to ask, which is really picking up on something that both you and Hina mentioned explicitly here on the difference between aspirations and expectations and that you all alluded to really in terms of the structural challenges that the young people and especially the girls in your research encountered when trying to make real their aspirations.

So what are the factors both within and outside of schools that you found that are thwarting a sense of belonging for the young people and their families and their teachers in your research and more specifically to the theme of the symposium, what policies and practices do you see that need to be de- and then reconstructed? And Hina, why don't we start off with you this time.

Hina Saleem [00:23:02] Thank you, Jen. Honestly, I often find it dishonest to ask rural communities in Sindh about their aspirations from education because of the structural barriers that exist. First, when we look at poverty, it affects health and nutrition of children. It also has gendered effects, where girls as young as six-year-old are pulled into household chores and care for their younger siblings. And schools on a standalone basis cannot intervene their way out of structural problems like poverty. So when we think about deconstructing education, strong needs is there to coordinate with welfare based organizations like for providing in school feeding programs, health services and greater alignment is needed with cash transfers, which is a program that is already in place in Pakistan.

Secondly, I want to highlight that how structurally our public schools are designed to meet needs of children mostly up to primary. 90% of public schools are up to grade five in Sind, and there are issues with primary to half of the settlements that we visited as part of the research did not have a functional primary school, even though there was a school building, in the other half, there was overcrowding in classrooms.

Finally, when, when children complete education, there are also, there's also lack of economic opportunities. One father was we met as part of this work was very demotivated, shared with us that he doesn't expect his children to have jobs or business opportunities even if they complete education. And he felt it was better to not let them study further. This was disheartening. Yes.

Anthony Luvanda [00:24:43] Just to pick up on Hina's point on economic opportunities and the sort of the further feeling that there's not enough opportunity, economic, economic opportunities for their children or the children are finished school. Education in itself is supposed to be able to equip you to equip those who are going through it, the ability to identify and access opportunities. That is a very important aspect of education that unfortunately is mostly overlooked. But if it is not carefully implemented, it can in itself, again, be an hindrance from these particular opportunities.

Look at ICT careers, for example. If we have not structured ways of ensuring that the girls who are going to education are able to know about ICT careers, are able to know what ICT careers are, and how they can get into those ICT careers. Then you are saying that the education that you are providing these girls in is itself a hindrance towards preventing them from doing that. Therefore, in my opinion, it is important that to be able to expose these girls to ICT careers and what they're all about, and on top of that, we need to come up with strategic systems that will enable them to be able to embrace and understand how they can achieve the goal of being within the ICT careers.

That is one of the best ways in which you can be able to tackle the gender gap. Otherwise, if you do not expose these girls to the opportunities to the skills and equip them with the knowledge that they know how to be able to do so, they are not doing any good to them as far as ICT careers are concerned. But also, we need to know that teachers as well need to be exposed on these ICT careers, so they also play a role within that particular environment.

Halimatou Hima [00:26:23] No to a point raised earlier by Hina, I think, regarding how to, or what policies need to be deconstructed and reconstructed, I think when you consider the issue of forced displacement, the first really is evidence. Evidence matters because of the complexity of these

issues. But in forced displacement, it's evolving nature as well. It's really crucial to constantly close that knowledge gap on education in crisis settings. And for this local expertise and knowledge really matters.

And the second point that I want to bring to the table is that we often see a lot of sectors working in isolation, in enforced displacement, or the provision of education in forced displacement. And it's really critical to bridge those silos, placing the needs of the most marginalized children at the center, and also integrating an understanding of how a lot of multiple intersecting crises exacerbate vulnerabilities, particularly for girls when we consider the experiences in schools.

And the third point is to really be intentional about understanding social norms. And this is a key point, because what we see in forced displacement many, many times, at least when I consider the case of the Sahel, is that you have shifting gender norms and social norms because of the reconfiguration of society. And sometimes these norms become more rigid and other times, paradoxically, much more gender equal.

And and lastly, on deconstructing but also reconstructing that notion of providing education in forced displacement with an understanding that what is basic can be very exclusionary. So forced displacement exposes various forms of exclusion in the classroom. When classes, when schools, for example, do not really adapt to account for the psychosocial and emotional needs of children, or when sometimes schools do not have proper sanitation and wash facilities, adolescent girls can easily be pushed out. So and we see that often disengagement with schooling is a result of an education system that does not recognize or account for the needs that forcibly displaced children. So there's a lot of deconstructing and reconstructing to do at several levels.

Bhawana Shrestha [00:28:55] That's, that's so true, Halima and I want to build on to the point what you made on that basic is exclusionary. Yes. Because access to schooling is so important for social emotional health. It's a basic need of any individual. Right. We know that to have this sense of belonging, to decide for ourselves and to develop the competencies that helps ourselves build on those aspirations. And only when these basics are fulfilled, then then only anyone can learn, which creates a sort of virtuous cycle, ensuring their retention and learning in the school.

However, the problem is that the social cultural barriers are such that at this point, and just as Anthony focuses on the, on the girls who are seeking a lot of support, especially from their teachers, and in terms of addressing their social emotional needs, especially from their female teachers in the

context of Nepal. And that's what is not being met in in our context, because the teachers in my research reported that that's what they are less prioritizing currently because of all the systemic barriers that they are going through themselves. And here it's very, very urgent that we start focusing on the teacher's well-being and teacher's competency in their, in their emotional literacy skills to help bring the desired learning outcomes.

Jennnifer O'Donoghue [00:30:28] Thank you. Thank you so much, that one actually, I do want to continue on what you're ending with here and you know that several of you have mentioned now around teachers and all of you really write about in your policy briefs around sort of the, the critical role of teachers in promoting aspirations, belonging and agency, and then also the barriers and often very similar barriers to what the students and the young people are facing, that teachers have to face the challenges that they have in order to support their students and the quite heavy expectations that are placed on them, often without sufficient supports.

So maybe we could talk a bit around, you know, the challenges that you've seen, particularly for teachers that you know, so challenges teachers are facing. What supports do teachers need? What do they have? And importantly, what is missing? If we really want teachers to take on this role as creating spaces and experiences of belonging for young people. Let's see, Anthony, do you want to kick us off.

Anthony Luvanda [00:31:26] Okay. Thank you, Jen. First of all, it's very important what's the critical role of teachers. Basically, if we have to have any meaningful interventions in whatever aspect of education, then teachers must be at the forefront of ensuring that we are able to achieve that. We cannot be able to achieve much without making sure that teachers play an important role at ensuring that they actually do play that role. So what are some of the, the disadvantages that you can associate with teachers in terms of what needs to happen and what is lacking.

First of all, with regards to ICT, girls at a very low level will look at teachers as one of their role models. Yet you look at these schools and you find that most of them have very few personnel who can even teach or work or even just simply troubleshoot computers, and where they exist, very few of them are women, if any. In fact, in some cases none at all are women. And that is at all levels of education, including the tertiary education. So we need to have teachers that are being trained in ICT so that they can be able to impart this knowledge on the young girls, so that they can be able to talk to

them about the career that exists out there so they can be able to advocate for these particular careers out there.

So the first thing is to be able to train these teachers, without the training we are not doing much. The teacher themselves don't know anything about ICT careers to begin then the advocacy misses, they cannot then therefore act as role models for the girls in ICT because these girls have never seen them touching or working with the computer. That does not become the case. What happens within the Kenyan environment to frame that. The digital environment, some digital companies will come to schools, do a one-off event, maybe on a weekend, one day in a month and such like things and then go away. Come back after another two, three months. There needs to be continuity of such events, such practices, such exercises. That cannot happen without the teachers. So for me, I would say that teachers need to be trained so that they can take up these roles. Once we have them, then the level of advocacy within ICT and computing jobs becomes at a higher level of the schools, and the girls can be able to embrace it.

Bhawana Shrestha [00:33:48] Mm. That's so true, Tony. What you shared completely resonates with my own finding that I did on, in terms of social emotional learning in case of like Nepal. So I started this research keeping social emotional needs of adolescent girls in mind. But the startling finding was that it's the teachers when we need to support socially and emotionally first, if we need to cater to the needs of adolescent girls. And that's what we are missing to see. We are not giving enough space to highlight the roles and need of teachers enough. To begin with, the number of female teachers at the secondary level must increase. So out of seven schools I visited, there were there was only one school which had three female teachers teaching at the secondary level, and the others either had one or zero number of female teachers. And the teachers who were there also reported invisible barriers to their professional development, access of emotional labor, burden, and most of all, the, they were struggling to find a balance between their home as well as school chores, and and in and in managing their emotions.

So when enough support is not provided, anything apart from going through the content feels like an added work for all of our teachers, and I can share that from my own personal experience, me being a teacher myself. So social emotional learning can easily be incorporated in the already existing content. But the problem is that not having enough skills as to how to blend that is coming across as a huge problem. So at this point, while we need to build foundational support and plan for SEL on one

hand, now on the other hand, we need to strengthen and promote transformative social, emotional learning, knowledge, skills and belief of female teachers by bringing multiple stakeholders together.

Halimatou Hima [00:35:55] No to Bhawana's point on women as teachers, I think it plays such a critical role, especially in rural areas, for communities that are facing insecurity. And back to my research, I think inclusion for forcibly displaced children often begins with teachers. Both Anthony and Bhawana spoke about the need to better equip teachers with training and tools, and in this case, it is also true. And to do that so that teachers are able to address the specific needs of children who are forcibly displaced. You know, we see that teachers who are in emergency and crisis settings often find themselves playing the role of psychologist or first responder and many, many other key roles when we are operating in context where other services have collapsed.

So, many take on these extra roles without benefiting from additional training. And this can undermine their ability to respond to what children need, including in terms of psychosocial needs. And we know from studies in other contexts that meaningfully engaging teachers can transform their learning experiences, but also, I think providing incentives such as monetary incentives for teaching in crisis settings in addition to training, can also facilitate teacher retention, which can be quite low in such context.

So and I think, we would, replacing the notion of teacher in the context of the Central Sahel, we shouldn't forget the teachers too suffer the consequences of insecurity. In that region, now, nearly 30,000 teachers are deprived of the opportunity to teach because schools are closed down. So when these interruptions in education happen in conflict settings, in places where schools can sometimes be a site of violence, these also do have adverse psychological effects both on students and teachers alike. And teachers are often forgotten in the response. And that needs to change.

Hina Saleem [00:38:14] Yeah. Picking up on the critical role of women teachers or female teachers in girls' education, I want to examine it in the context of rural Sindh. Adult female literacy is just around 20% and secondary school enrollment for women is much lower in schools. And education policy needs to think about alternatives for settlements where female teachers are not available yet. When I worked on design of community-based education program at the Citizens Foundation, parents expressed comfort with older girls to be taught by a male member of the same settlement. And some of those alternatives can be thought of. In terms of support that teachers need for teaching, multi grade teaching is highlighted as one of the strong areas that needs that support.

Around three fourths of public primary schools in Sindh comprise of two rooms or less. Parents perceive this as a recipe for disaster when students from five grades sit in a single room, even though multi-grade has been effective in other contexts.

So which means that it's an opportunity to support teachers and train them and then work with the parents to change their perceptions. Parents also shared that learning needs of their children due to the cost, gains are not met. How parents perceive quality is important as it affects their motivation to send their children to school. And teachers should be supported in addressing the effects of inequalities that exist outside of the schools on children's experiences in the classroom so that classrooms operate as sites of inclusion and children feel a sense of belonging and that their education needs are met.

Jennnifer O'Donoghue [00:40:00] Thank you, Hina. I want to jump in here and just remind people that they can ask us questions, either through Twitter using the hashtag Echidna scholars or by sending questions to events at Brookings at edu. And I'm going to switch a bit from talking about the sort of content findings of your research to a reflection on the research itself and the research process. And I think, you know, one thing that stands out from, from all of your research is that policy to date has really been ineffective in including systemically marginalized populations in transformative learning experiences. And it becomes apparent through your work that to transform policy and practice, we also need to change the evidence we use to design that policy.

And I think this is a critical point for all of all of us who try to promote evidence informed policymaking that we really question what is the evidence that we're basing those policy recommendations on? And so what I want to ask from your own experiences of doing research with systemically excluded populations, what do we need to do better as researchers when we talk about de- and reconstructing education policy and practice for transformative belonging and agency, how can we change how we do the research to better inform that policy and practice? And Halima, let's start with you this time.

Halimatou Hima [00:41:13] Oh Jen there is so much that can change and that needs to change. I think firstly you cannot meaningfully engage or include those whose educational experiences, outcomes and trajectories are not fully understood. So a first step really is to lift this, the invisibility that surrounds especially internally displaced children and to better document their educational experiences. And secondly, in terms of doing research with systemically, systemically

excluded populations, I think we need to do better at checking our assumptions at the door. And I also had to do a lot of that during my research.

You know, I expected to, for instance, go to communities that would be waiting for things to happen to them. But I saw, for example, in a village affected by insecurity, parents crowd found about half a million CFA, which is 900 USD in order to hire teachers for their children. And I think a third thing is to really begin to embody the fact that research has to be contextual, not instrumental, not extractive. With an approach that allows people to express their life histories if they choose to do so with dignity. And lastly, I think we attach a lot of meaning to words such as resilience in displacement or even the notion of communities. Yes, there are communities, but it's also safe to assume that there is the diversity of voices and experiences that we often do not capture because we view communities as a monolith, which is often not the case. So a lot of, I think, reconstructing and deconstructing to do in terms of approach. And I will stop here.

Bhawana Shrestha [00:43:12] Mm hmm. Yeah. Halima, I want to build on to what you shared and especially emphasize re-emphasize on the thought point that you made on the importance of contextual research. So extensive contextual research is missing that addresses the differentiated needs of adolescent, adolescents and based on the gender identities that they have formed. So it is important that we identify who the important stakeholders are and who would help bring the systemic change and involve them in the research process right from the beginning.

So mostly the contextual research related to the gender role, identities of adolescents, the range of skills that the like that they are in need of, ways to, to address them, the concerns related to their well-being to help them achieve better learning and more specifically, the ways teachers could support them are very, very important. Though there is a general idea about what adolescent girls need to have better learning outcomes. Context, context specific evidence is still missing, and that's what I want to re-emphasize on.

Hina Saleem [00:44:22] Yeah. Jen, to the broader question of what is missing, I often ask myself how participation in these processes can be made more authentic. What research methods can be used to address power dynamics in knowledge generation? One method that worked for us in the context of rural Sindh was using a visual based approach to ensure that participation of mothers and children was there in the process. In my past experience, I'd often seen hesitation from mothers

that they do not know anything about schooling because they hadn't experienced it firsthand, and to build what they know, we took visuals, representing different aspects of schooling.

My research assistant, Rubayala Zamani, and I sat in a circle with children, mothers and fathers to design an ideal school, asking them about their preferred solutions helped us in benefiting from the local knowledge. When we did this activity in the first time, we noticed husbands making more decisions and dominating the conversation. We then conducted this activity in separate groups with mothers and fathers to overcome the power dynamics at the level of the settlement, at least for the purpose of this research. Understanding the historical context, I believe, is also very important, as current realities are products of history. I started doing that more recently through writing the policy brief and seeing the effects of historical policies. It's an area that I want to delve into more, especially considering the lingering effects of colonization in Pakistan.

Anthony Luvanda [00:45:58] If you look at what all the scholars are talking about, Jen, in response to your question about the evidence that we use with regards to marginalizing, marginalized communities. You realize that we are talking about contextual research and how it can be used to implement policy. And it is extremely important, from my perspective, that the excluded communities are made part of the research. In my research, for example, ICT careers, girls not being in ICT careers, and the fact that they have been excluded from ICT careers makes them an excluded community. Hina has done a good job of describing to us how she actually went about conducting the research.

And the biggest problem and what needs to be done with regards to research that leads to policies that affect marginal communities is to ensure that the marginalized individuals, groups are right at the center of the research. In most cases, we do not put them in the center of the research. Therefore, if you're not doing that, then they are rarely, going, their views are rarely going to be heard, for example, whatever insights we come up with, they're coming up with experts, yes, but who have no actual experience of the exclusion itself and what it feels to be excluded in that particular way.

For example, we talk about education. For me, the people, the students, the girls, the teachers, those are the main stakeholders. They should be at the center for that particular research. If you're not doing that, then there's a high chance that whatever policies you formulate, whatever interventions we come up with, will not be strategic and will not be aligned with the needs of those that are marginalized. Thank you.

Jennnifer O'Donoghue [00:47:48] Great. Thank you. I think there are some really key things, again, for all of us who do research and policy research aimed at engaging and including excluded populations to think about as we move forward. And unfortunately, I'm seeing the clock and seeing that our time together has flown and is sort of drawing to a close. So I wanted us to sort of think about as we move into this closing, what have each of you learned that that gives you hope? You know, I think as we've seen through this, throughout this conversation today and I've learned over the past year of knowing you all, each of you are deeply invested in trying to create gender transformative policy and practice that promote belonging and agency for some of the most excluded girls and young women. And there are significant barriers to that. And as we've talked about again over the past 6 to 9 months together, often the narrative gets sort of stuck on those barriers, right? That we continually talk about the barriers and, and you all have really emphasized the need to change those narratives.

So again, as our conversation comes to a close here, I'd love to hear from each of you about what keeps you going, how you change those narratives. What are some of the things that you've learned about how we can co-construct a different present and future with and for girls? We've had a question directed to you all about how to be more inclusive in the work that we do of the voices of girls and young women themselves. And then what does your research need, say needs to be done moving forward?

And I'm going to attach a little question here that we had about implementation in particular. So sorry, that's a bit of a big question. But wrapping up in terms of what gives you hope, what you've learned about, about co-constructing solutions with and for girls, and what do we need to do moving forward, especially thinking about implementation and I think Bhawana do you want to kick us off.

Bhawana Shrestha [00:49:44] I would like to get the answer for this question first. So thank you very much, Jen, and also to the ones who I ask this question. So this is, hope is very important as we move forward. And in these last six months when as I've deep dived into this research, something that I and also Osin Gurung [phonetic] who has been helping me with my research, what has given us hope is that the recent research work and the National and international conference and discussions that have actually started to focus on teachers' wellbeing, that has given us immense hope. And the teachers that I talk to, that we talk to are already doing a lot, even under difficult circumstances and limitedness.

So it just gives me, gives us sort of so much hope that how much more the teachers can do, if provided with further opportunities and support. Currently there exist a disconnect in the student teacher relationship between female teachers and students due to the large part of the lack of social emotional learning awareness among female teachers. But even in that context, the students have reported how much support their teachers are providing for them now and the immense belief that the students have showed for the teachers. I myself, being a teacher gives me so much to look forward to. So therefore it's critical for the national government, local government, school management committees and the school leaders to sift their attention towards helping female teachers foster emotionally literacy skills and that that I think that is achievable.

Anthony Luvanda [00:51:19] With regards to hope, I think from my studies, what gave me a lot of hope is the fact that, first of all, there seems to be an understanding that the problem does exist. There seems to be a lot of enthusiasm from the teachers and some other stakeholders who feel that something needs to be done about it. There's even been attempts to try and do something about it. What really gave me the biggest of hope is the fact that most of the girls that we talked to, especially the young ones, feel that there are no careers that are designated for boys or men and those are designated for women, which for me is one of the major leaps that needs to be there with regards to trying to get girls into ICT and all that. So that is, there's a lot of hope around that. But what are the lessons that have been learned here.

First of all, cumulative disadvantages exist, it's not just one, and therefore one solution cannot be implemented or are not limited to one person, one individual or one group of individuals. To be able to solve this particular problem there needs to be a wholesome approach. A wholesome approach needs to revolve around us trying to do the following, first of all, advocacy, ensuring that we promote ICT careers among the girls and young women, using media or whatever ways in which we can be able to do. We need to expose these girls to ICT careers; we need to expose them to role models as well.

And most importantly, again, we need to be able to provide adequate educational vocational counseling for girls before they choose subjects that they're going to sit for examination, which is what translates into, what they need to know to use to get into a particular university course. That is very important. So programs do exist already that are trying to solve the problem, but unfortunately, they are not, first of all, looking at gender, but basically just looking at ICT without looking at gender.

Secondly, they need to be strategically structured for us to be able to achieve that. If they are not strategically structured, then there is an issue with how we are going to achieve this.

Halimatou Hima [00:53:38] Jen, to, to answer your question on hope. And, and I think one of the biggest consequences of forced displacement is, it interrupts, is the interruption of education. And for me, hope really takes me back to the mothers in Tadres, for example, that were organizing to ensure that their children stay in school despite the harsh conditions that forced displacement imposes on them. And to really see that children and young people want to go to a school, a school that is welcoming and that allows them to, to, to, to learn.

Another, another point in the course of this work was seeing how welcoming host communities were to internally displaced persons and refugees when they themselves might be facing very, very challenging circumstances. So there is a solidarity in alleviating the burden that insecurity is placing on the Sahelian population. And my third point of hope, as technical as it sounds, is really seeing governments coming together with local actors, trying and striving to remove some of those structural barriers. It gives me hope because evidence shows that when this is done well, children can learn in the harshest of conditions and realize their potential.

And to my last point, I am hopeful when I see cases of positive deviance. You know, a few years ago, a large number of schools in the region of Diffa, which is in the southeast of Niger, were closed. But today we're seeing a reversal of this trend. And this is what I hope to see also in places such as Tillabéri in the Southwest.

Hina Saleem [00:55:25] Thank you. Hope for me, comes from the strong cultural identity and rich history of Sindh, and pride in maintaining that. We also see that hope at the level of the settlements where if we sit with them for extended periods, they share the poems and songs that have been passed through generations, through oral traditions. And this also then inspired us and continues to inspire us to bring those experiences of joy into the classroom with co-creation of classroom lessons with community members in documenting those oral traditions as part of schooling. Hope for me also comes from the fact that the government is interested and that our working groups engaged with the issue of out-of-school children.

But implementation remains challenging, and one thing that I often see is that it has to be holistic. It cannot be on a piecemeal basis and also needs to consider how a new intervention interplays with the existing structure that exists. For instance, there is now a tendency to move

towards bigger schools in Sindh which is great, but then has to think about how children without the necessary infrastructure or transport would get to those schools.

Lastly, with respect to education policy, when it comes to girls' education, I would strongly caution that it does not require additional modules, but it does require reconstruction of existing processes and the willingness and understanding to go the extra mile to include all children. For instance, when enrollment drives are needed in rural areas to motivate parents and signal to them that their child is school ready, for that enrollment drive to be successful in including girls, women have to be part of that process in conducting those drives and to be able to access mothers and children in those settlements.

Jennnifer O'Donoghue [00:57:20] Thank you all for that. Unfortunately, we've come to the end of our time. This conversation has really brought up critical insights into what it means to belong and how that shapes and is shaped by aspirations about the need to de- and reconstruct systems, policies and practices both within and outside of education, about how we do or don't support educators, and about how we can transform the ways in which we engage in research to include the voices of systemically excluded young people in their communities, and what evidence matters for creating contextualized, gender transformative spaces of belonging for girls and young women. I want to add to this that what gives me hope too is not only hearing and understanding this connection between what is happening locally and the richness of local experiences and efforts and increased understanding of how we can bring those into policy conversations to make real change, but also knowing that all of you are out there doing this work. So our time was short.

I want to remind everyone that this plenary conversation is just the beginning. This is the kickoff event of our three-day Research and Policy Symposium, Symposium on Gender Equality in and Through Education. Later today, tomorrow and Wednesday, each of our scholars will be hosting a deep dive Interactive Virtual workshop into their specific research topics. So this will give you the opportunity to go deep into these four topics that you've heard about in this hour today. And we will have the participation of also an extraordinary group of international and national actors that will help them explore their findings and recommendations in more detail. But please find more information and register for those events on the symposium event page.

I just want to say we are also currently receiving applications for the 2023 cohort of Echidna global scholars. The deadline for this has been extended to January 1st. So please visit the Brookings

Web page or reach out to us for more information on that. And please do apply. And just a huge thank you again to our 2022 Echidna Global Scholars. Thank you to all of you who have joined us today for this conversation. And please continue the conversation on Twitter using the hashtag Echidna scholars. We hope to see you again in our virtual workshops. Thank you. And take care.