

E. Thomas Ewing, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

June 21, 2007

Understanding 'New Sprouts of Life' in Girls' Education: Comparative and Historical Perspectives on Soviet Education During the 1930s

Abstract

One way to understand the structural conditions impeding the education of girls and the potential for transformative practices and policies is by examining similar processes in other historical situations. While most of the discussion of the Afghan situation has sought comparisons either with other Muslim societies which have accommodated new opportunities for girls within reformed religious practices or with the poorest regions of Sub-Saharan Africa where systemic poverty combines with cultural practices to exclude girls from basic education, this working paper argues that a broader set of comparisons could bring new insights into the underlying structural as well as immediate policy and practical measures that both exclude and include girls. In particular, this paper suggests that the Soviet Union provides a case study of how a public commitment to educating girls as part of a broader policy of women's equality in fact depended on local practices, involved negotiations and contestations, and ultimately compromised promises of equity for advances in access. This working paper is thus an effort to situate a case study in a broader comparative and transnational framework that can lead to some suggestions about possible interpretations of and responses to the specific conditions of girls' education in the contemporary world.