

**The Millennium Development Goals
and
the United Nations Girls Education Initiative**

A Guidance Note to UN Country Teams

*UN Girls' Education Initiative
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of the UNGEI Guidance Note

The UNGEI Guidance Note shows how to form strong partnerships for girls' education at regional and country levels – between governments, the UN system, bilaterals and non governmental organisations, and among schools, families and communities. It provides a rationale for girls' education; places the work of girls' education in the context of the Millennium Development Goals; and provides principles for including girls' education in national development plans and programmes to achieve access to quality education for girls.

1.2 Background

In April 1990, the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, identified improving access to quality education for girls and women as “the most urgent priority”. At the Dakar World Education Forum, in April 2000, participants from 164 countries re-affirmed this commitment, ‘ensuring that by 2015 all children, with special emphasis on girls, have access to and complete a primary education of good quality.’

EFA broadcast a message to the world that the centuries of attitudes and practices keeping girls and women from their full development would no longer be tolerated. The next decade brought great effort, some progress and new and stronger commitments. But those promises remain unmet.

In April 2000, at the Dakar World Education Forum, the United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, launched the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). In an unprecedented step, 13 UN entities, led by UNICEF, have agreed to work together on this 10-year initiative to help governments meet their commitments to ensure a quality education for all girls everywhere.

UNGEI is a dynamic partnership to promote gender equality in education with targeted actions for girls' education as an entry point. By 2002, each of the entities had succeeded in mainstreaming girls' education within their organisational mechanisms and structures. Girls' education is at the forefront of political and programming priorities at a headquarters level, and entities continue to make good progress towards partnering for gender equality in education “on the ground”.

2. RATIONALE

2.1 Girls' Education from the perspective of UNGEI

The goal of UN programming for and support of girls' education is to ensure the fulfilment of the right to a quality education by each member of the largest single group of children denied this right—girls.

This statement reflects several fundamental principles:

- Education of poor quality is a denial of rights
- Inequality of access to quality education is a violation of rights
- Education must be gender-sensitive and gender-responsive in each and every one of the following dimensions of quality:
 - the way learners are reared and prepared for learning
 - the content of schooling
 - the teaching-learning processes
 - the learning environment
 - the opportunities to achieve specified learning outcomes
- The education of girls must be **mainstreamed** within a nation's education system

UNGEI's aim is to achieve equality of enrolment and achievement in education, between girls and boys. UNGEI will measure this by increased net enrolment rates and decreased gender gaps, demonstrable success in the implementation of quality programmes and documented achievements in learning for girls and boys.

The goal of the UN Girls' Education Initiative is to mount a sustained campaign to improve the quality and availability of girls' education through a collaborative partnership of different entities within and outside the UN system.

The following documents outline the intellectual underpinnings and strategic objectives of the Initiative. These are:

- *The 10-Year UN Girls' Education Initiative Concept Paper*
- *UNGEI Action Plan, Girls' Education: Action Now!*
- *UNGEI Brochure: A new Global Partnership meets an old Global Challenge*
- *These documents are available on DevLink website www.undg.org or may be obtained through the contacts at the end of this Guidance Note.*

In addition the UNGEI Technical Booklet on Working for Gender Equality in Education is under preparation.

It is important to note that the UNGEI is not limited to basic education. Rather, it focuses on a systemic approach. However, without universal quality basic education progress at other levels is impossible. Because approximately 68 million girls are denied even the very first level of education, basic education is the emphasis of this guidance.

The UN Girls' Education Initiative takes a systemic approach (see Annex I, ACC approved policy statement at end of guide). Thus, UN team efforts must contribute to sustainable system development and not consist of isolated projects that operate on the

margins and that have little chance of contributing to overall improvement of national education, from a gender perspective, by increasing girls access to and achievement of education of good quality.

2.2 The challenge of making quality education universal

Quality Education for All means those successful innovations and reforms that have resulted in significant improvement in terms of increased net enrolment rates and decreased gender gaps must be taken to scale in one way or another. If this does not occur, only a relative few will benefit from quality education. Any innovation will never be perfect. Nevertheless, it is essential to begin to move an innovation to scale when it has proven its worth over time and at a “reasonable” scale, recognising that innovation is a dynamic process that will continue. **To accelerate girls’ education demands more than a technical response. It requires political and fiscal commitments applied to technical solutions that have been shown to make a difference in the particular context.**

3. UNGEI AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Related to Girls’ Education, the Millennium Development Goals sets the following targets:

- *Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling*
- *Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and to all levels of education not later than 2015*

The Millennium Development Goals on education and gender equality reinforce previous international agreements most notably the Education for All Conference in 1990, and the Dakar World Education Forum in 2000, that launched the Secretary-General’s UN Girls Education Initiative, to which practically all countries have subscribed.

The UN Girls’ Education Initiative works to fulfill these goals. The Millennium Declaration, endorsed by 189 governments and 147 heads of state, represents a wider and more authoritative consensus which UNGEI, with its quantitative and qualitative objectives, can both support and benefit from. The Declaration puts the goals related to poverty and development in the context of a rights based approach, and, very clearly, makes reaching people the centerpiece of its vision. The MDG “roadmap” presented to the 2001 General Assembly, emphasizing the “people” focus, estimates that, in the year 2000, there were 113 million children of primary school age not in school, of whom about 68 million are girls. These children are the main targets of the Declaration, together with the cohorts who will be denied school entry and completion in succeeding years.

Girls’ education needs to be addressed in a broader context that acknowledges the need to fight against hunger, rural poverty or other barriers to gender equity.

4. BROAD STRATEGIES FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION

- Strategies need to address **quantity**- enrolment and retention of girls in education systems – and **quality** – substantive content, teaching processes, the learning environment, and other aspects of quality, all of which are measured through learning achievement of girls.
- Differentiated strategies can be considered for countries with different approaches to development, with different capacities and opportunities. For countries where the net enrolment of girls is below 85%, their education must be a priority. Where even boys' enrolment is less than 50%, greater focus might be given to increasing enrolment and retention across the board, in the first instance, recognizing that retention is highly associated with qualitative improvements. In middle income countries where enrolment of boys and girls is already accelerated significantly, greater attention could be given to quality and disparity reduction. This does not imply that attention to quality should await reaching enrolment targets, rather, it is a matter of relative balance in selectivity and prioritization depending on national and sub-national specific situations, recognizing that quality is a key factor in enrolment, retention and achievement.
- Quantitative and qualitative indicators need to be benchmarked and monitored, with interim milestone targets on the road to 2015. How many girls are out of school? How many girls can we give access to, and in what time frame, up to 2005? What dimensions of the content, processes, environments of education will need to be supported, and in what time frame, up to 2015, so that both girls and boys have equal access to all levels of education?
- Identify the annual gap and additional funding needs. Identify possible sources nationally and internationally, including soft loans.
- It is critical that Ministry of Finance officials is fully engaged in the above process from the beginning in order to have their full support.
- In the context of the Millennium Declaration, education needs to be seen not only as a development goal, but also as an instrument of peace building and conflict prevention. In the aftermath of humanitarian disasters, getting schooling going is one of the principal elements of healing and accelerating the return of society to normalcy.
- Education for all is a human right. It is inclusive of disadvantaged groups such as the mentally or physically challenged, ethnic minorities, indigenous populations, nomadic populations and others.
- As girls make up the bulk of excluded children, targeting them and succeeding means you include many other disadvantaged ethnic minorities, disabled, etc., at the same

time. Girls are often doubly disadvantaged. Targeting rural girls, who are among the poorest of the poor, may require special strategies to respond to their educational needs.

5. SUPPORT TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

5.1 National Education Plans must be nationally owned

There is broad agreement that for strategies, programmes and projects to be effective, they must be nationally owned in a true sense, that is, owned by the government and other national partners. Most countries make national development plans, which are nationally owned in principle, though sometimes they are lacking in quality and in broad-based consultation. External partners must ensure their efforts are focussed with the government to improve the consultative process of national planning as well as the quality of the national development plan.

While in every country, the education targets for 2005 and 2015 may be adjusted in the national context, it is generally expected that such adjustments will not alter the essence of the agreed goals. The UN and other external partners are pledged to support national plans to achieve those targets. Indeed various instruments of the UN and other partners are well positioned to support national development plans for education. What we must ensure is that all education plans within a country are unified, that they use common language and that they include specifically the commitment to girls' education, and particularly these excluded girls who are doubly disadvantaged, e.g. rural girls.

5.2 Analysis of fundamental barriers and solutions

There are many reasons why millions of children do not fulfil their fundamental right to quality education. Barriers to education exist in access, quality and achievement and are often inter-related. What has become particularly clear in the years following the 1990 Jomtien meeting is that approaching education as purely an access issue – i.e. about how many children are enrolling in school, is incomplete. Access, quality and achievement are inextricably linked. There is little point to a girl enrolling in school if she is going to drop out soon after that because of the poor quality of education she is receiving.

Boys and girls have hurdles to overcome in order to gain access to quality education. However, it is argued that experience has shown that for girls, the hurdles are often higher and more frequent. And when a child is discriminated against on grounds other than gender – be it on the basis of ethnicity, disability, urban-rural residence, HIV/AIDS, etc., when the child is a girl, she is at a double disadvantage.

Some of the barriers to achieve gender equality in education are:

- The direct and indirect costs of education which can be high.

- Traditional attitude and practice which can work against a child’s right to education
- The legal framework which is often weak and disadvantages girls in particular.
- The irrelevance of schooling. Children are more likely to drop out of school if it is irrelevant to their realities.
- Issues of safety and security in and around school particularly affect girls.
- The education system itself can be a considerable barrier to education.

A more analytical description of these barriers is available in the UNGEI technical booklet on “Working for Gender Equality in Education” (in preparation). It also gives suggestions for overcoming the barriers to Girls’ Education. Programme implementation for girls will involve:

- building political and resource commitments;
- closing the gender gap;
- ending gender bias and discrimination within education systems;
- helping girls’ education in crisis, conflict and post-conflict situations, including those affected by HIV/AIDS;
- eliminating ingrained gender bias that limits the demand for girls’ education.

These are the five strategic objectives of UNGEI.

5.3 Country Specific Goals in the context of CCA

Global goals and targets need to be understood in country specific situations, and national strategies to reach them designed for each country specific context. The starting point is to ascertain, for each country, how many primary school age girls and boys are out of school. Annex II provides current estimates of primary net enrolment by country (along with the number out of school), and Annex III for secondary enrolment. Since national ownership is key, and most countries have nationally owned development plans, it is most appropriate that the UN Common Country Assessment have the kind of data and analysis on education, including girls’ education, that will inform and support national strategic planning in this sector.

In particular, a high quality CCA, with its data and causal analysis, will help inform the national planning process and support formulation of the education sector national plan, specifically articulating what the government and national partners will do to achieve education goals. This in turn should be reflected in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), a pre-condition for support by the World Bank and IMF. Strategies for what external partners will do to support national education plans will be contained in UNDAF for the UN, for the World Bank in the Country Assistance Strategy, and for the European Union in the CCSP. Other donors, particularly Bi-laterals, can join this process especially

through the participatory process offered by CCA-UNDAF and sector wide programmes. Programmes and projects in support of the national education plan would follow from the strategies. The CCA should include an analysis of gender issues in education. Any theme group for Girls' Education that is formed at the country level should ensure that this focus on gender is included, and subsequent programming for girls' education ensues.

The Common Country Assessment: Principal things to look for

- How many children are out of school, where are they (districts, rural-urban), who are they (boys, girls, disadvantaged groups), why are they not in school? (This may relate to household division of labour, traditional views about girls' education etc.).
- Enrolment and completion rates and numbers, differentiated by geographic districts, rural urban, gender, and disadvantaged groups .
- Number of schools and their distribution by districts, relative to the population. Access to schools based on how much time it takes a pupil to reach (factors include terrain and transport mode, rural-urban). Physical quality of schools, availability of water and toilets.
- Quality and relevance of curricula. Gender sensitivity of curriculum content.
- Number of teachers by district relative to the school population, differentiated by gender. student to teacher ratio. Quality of teachers, numbers of trained teachers. Adequacy of salaries and allowances, motivation.
- Nature of the learning environment. Is it non-violent, effective and gender-fair and gender responsive?
- Number of trained educational supervisors by district and gender. Frequency of school visits. Quality of educational supervision and guidance.
- Numbers and quality of teacher training, pre-service, refresher, and in-service. Gender sensitivity training for teachers and administrators.
- Availability and quality of textbooks and learning aids. Gender sensitivity of content and curriculum.
- Availability of adequate running and operating costs at school level.
- System to assess learning achievement, differentiated by district, rural-urban, and by gender.
- Management efficiency of the education system, including cost per pupil.
- Women in management positions in the educational system at all levels. Their status and access to professional development and career growth.

5.4 Partnering for Education within the UN: UNDAF

UNDAF provides the means for harmonising Girls' Education programmes at country level. Use this to your advantage for planning, funding, implementation and evaluation. What is essential is that the UN team develops a common vision of what the country really needs, and what would be a meaningful role for the UN in meeting those needs.

Then each agency would contribute towards that role to the best of its ability, and to the maximum extent that its mandate allows.

5.5 Sector Wide Approaches (SWAs) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)

The World Bank is a major UN partner in education and should be invited from the beginning to participate in the CCA and UNDAF in support of national development planning. In view of the Bank's intimate relationship with the PRSP, every effort should be made to obtain the Bank's support to have the MDG education goals well reflected and budgeted for in the PRSP, and thereafter, in the Bank's Country Assistance Strategy.

The Sector Wide Approach in education, and the Sector Investment Programme should be supportive of the education MDGs and co-ordinated with what the UN will do in support of the national plan. Likewise, the European Union, Bi-laterals and multilateral funding institutions should be encouraged to join the process from the very beginning, whenever possible.

6. PARTNERSHIP AND SOCIAL MOBILISATION

The very ambitious MDG goals on education cannot be achieved by ministries of education alone or by educators, though both are critical to the effort. A broader coalition of partnerships is essential, as well as a need to take education beyond the domain of the technical and turn it into a public movement in each country from the community grass roots to the political leadership. The following actions should be considered:

- Engage government at national, governorate and district levels. Engage the ministry of education but at least also the ministry of information, the ministry of finance, and the ministry of religious affairs if there is one. Other partners might include the ministry of labour if child labour is an issue, or the judiciary if laws (such as pregnancy laws) are in violation of the right to education.
- Influence the opinions and ideas of business leaders about education to mobilise their possible engagement in local financing of girls' education.
- Support communities to fully engage in mobilising efforts for girls' education, both in order to understand what they want for the upcoming generation and to mobilize their support to schools and educators in their community, including local financing.
- Facilitate NGOs and civil society organizations, especially those representing minority and marginalised groups, and professional and workers' associations (e.g. farmers' association, teachers' association, doctors' association) to lobby for girls' education.

- Enlist parliamentarians as partners for girls' education. UNGEI at country level will need to remain in touch with their views, to keep them sensitized to education issues, and to ensure they support the girls' education needs of their constituencies and support national funding and education reform legislation, especially as it relates to access to quality education for girls.
- Engage religious leaders as critical partners and mobilizers of parents and communities so that families get their children, especially girls, to school and keep them there. The networks of houses of worship are an indispensable link to mobilize communities for girls' education.
- Enlist the media to raise awareness and public demand for education, and keep girls' education issues constantly on the minds of leaders at national and sub-national levels. This is to a successful communication strategy.
- Consider children's views and recommendations in programme planning and advocacy for girls' education to help understand needs and concerns. It is a right of children to be consulted in decisions affecting them.
- Involve donor partners, who can provide technical, advocacy and financial support, including the World Bank, the EU and regional multi-lateral funding institutions.
- Ensure through national education policy that both private and public education efforts complement and support each other, and that both demonstrate a commitment to girls' education.
- Build closer linkages and alliances between UNGEI and the Partnership for Sustainable Strategies on Girls' Education, specifically as it relates to closer working partnerships between UN agencies and bilaterals working towards better integrated initiatives in-country and contributing to building a working information base for UNGEI.
- Where possible build UNGEI country theme groups to monitor implementation, commitments, and progress towards MDG goals. Use such groups to advocate for girls' education at country level, to seek multi-agency funding and to harmonise efforts for girls' education.

7. COST AND FINANCING

The UNGEI recognises that the greatest barrier to basic education for both boys and girls is poverty, and also that household poverty and the direct and indirect costs of education can impact in different ways on girls' and boys' access to education. Therefore, UNGEI sees the need for thorough assessment of the total costs of education borne by government, communities and households.

Public expenditure is also a key factor that influences access of children to education. Inadequate public investment in capital infrastructure or in recurrent expenditure results in limited or overcrowded facilities or poor quality education, both key factors responsible for exclusion, and often impacting differently on boys and girls. A number of tools for gender analysis of national budgets have recently been developed by the Gender Budget Initiative and may be a useful resource for girls' education. (<http://www.thecommonwealth.org/gender/htm/whatwedo/activities/macroeconomic/natgebudg.htm>)

In practical terms UNGEI at country level may wish to ensure that the following issues are taken into account in the development or modification of national education plans:

- Abolition of **school fees** for basic education in public schools, carried out in the context of a restructuring of the financing system to ensure an equitable distribution of public expenditure;
- Targeted strategies to reduce **other costs** of education e.g. books, uniforms etc. that are responsible for keeping children, especially girls, out of school;
- Targeted strategies, including childcare, access to water and various incentive schemes that help offset the impact on households of the **opportunity costs** (lost income or labour) of attending school;
- Inclusion in situation analysis/CCA and monitoring and reporting protocols coverage of **all expenditure** on education, both **public and household**;
- **Scrutiny of public expenditure** to ensure that the share allocated to education is **adequate**, and the distribution within sub-sectors, including rural populations, reflects appropriate prioritisation of basic education;
- **Gender analysis** of the education budget to detect and address public expenditure patterns that are inequitable;
- Increased **transparency** in public expenditure so that communities and parents can monitor and respond to inequities;
- Consensus around enhanced financing for EFA, related to helping countries develop feasible EFA plans.

8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The UNGEI boldly underlines the need to support the monitoring and evaluation of girls' education in order to better understand and support actions on resolving constraints and addressing emerging issues, as well as pursue and adapt successful strategies. For the

UNGEI members and partners to determine the level of progress throughout the coming decade, this particular area of work is considered most critical.

The UNGEI members and partners understand that several steps need to be taken and or reinforced in most countries that will result in a clear contextual analysis of girls' education that will lead the way to obtaining reliable and useful monitoring and evaluation outcomes over time.

- **A first step** involves making a diagnosis of the problem using available statistics/indicators of girls' educational outcomes (enrolment, promotion, completion, achievement rates) to identify the type and extent of girls' education in particular contexts.
- **A second step** requires identifying supply-side factors affecting girls' education, which refer to the availability and type of schooling/educational services offered to girls, and requires a review of policies, institutional services/procedures, school attributes, and school reform. Particular attention should ensure that public monies are equitably allocated and that they reach excluded groups e.g. girls in rural areas.
- **A third step** entails identifying demand-side factors affecting girls' education. These include conditions of poverty, and attitudes and practices outside the school and in the household and community influencing girls' participation in education, requiring analysis of social, political, and economic factors; cultural behaviours and expectations; and learning and living environments.
- **A fourth step** includes identifying the various stakeholders in girls' education at the different levels of the school system (national, district, and community levels) and within the community, (non-governmental organisations, religious groups, the media, business) which contribute to increasing understanding of the motivations of the beneficiaries, decision-makers, implementers, and enablers.

A more detailed discussion of these steps can be found in the UNGEI Technical Booklet on Working for Gender Equality in Education.

9. TECHNICAL RESOURCE SUPPORT

UNGEI will make available to country teams the following:

- List from UN agencies of departments and staff who can provide technical support to country teams in girls' education
- List of technical consultants and consulting firms in girls' education recommended by the agencies
- List of principal girls' education support institutions and NGOs by region

- List of technical web sites
- The UNGEI Technical Booklet on Working for Gender Equality in Education.
- Web sites of good examples and lessons learned (Devlink ++: www.undg.org)