

**ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
17 – 19 JUNE 2014 - International Conference Center Geneva**

THEMATIC SESSION

BACKGROUND PAPER

Girls' education – A cornerstone for women empowerment

Thursday 19 June, 08h00 – 09h00 – Room 5

“Empowering women and girls with more choices and more freedoms is crucial to achieving a better future for all. “ (Armatya Sen, Nobel laureate, 2012)

It is no novelty that investing in girls' education is probably the highest return on investment in the developing world. As empowering girls and women through education not only improves their own welfare, but also impacts the well-being of their children, families and communities. Educating girls and women means capacitating them to play an active role in decision-making processes of their communities; consequently, enabling them to trigger transformation processes of traditional mind-sets within their communities on matters such as girls' education or women's participation. Known positive effects of educating women and girls such as economic gains, sustainable family sizes and improvements in children's health demonstrate by example the value of educated women and gender parity within the communities.

Enhancing access to secondary girls' education

One additional year of secondary education would increase girls' future earning potential by 15-25 percent.¹ The impact on the national GDE in Kenya, for example, could then jump to \$3.4 billion – almost 10% – if all 1.6 million Kenyan girls completed secondary school and the 220,000 adolescent mothers avoided pregnancy.² In India, the prize is even higher. With nearly 4 million adolescent mothers annually, India loses \$383 billion in potential lifetime income. When a girl in the developing world receives seven years of education, she marries four years later and has 2.2 fewer children.³ Many studies demonstrate that educating girls beyond the primary level is linked with delayed marriages and pregnancies; hence reducing the number one reason for death of

¹ Psacharopoulos, George, and Harry Anthony Patrinos. 'Returns to Investment in Education: A Further Update', World Bank. Education Economics (2002) 12.2: (111-34). Retrieved from http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/547664-1099079934475/547667-1135281504040>Returns_Investment_Edu.pdf

² i Chaaban, Jad and Wendy Cunningham. "Measuring the Economic Gain of Investing in Girls: the girl effect dividend." World Bank 2011. http://econ.worldbank.org/external/default/main?entityID=000158349_20110808092702&pagePK=64165259

³ <http://www.girleffect.org/explore/taking-the-girl-effect-to-scale/deck-assets-the-world-for-girls>

adolescent girls aged 15-19 worldwide; the consequences of early pregnancies.⁴ Other secondary education impacts leading to an increased public health in general are lower birth rates, reduced infant mortality and less likelihood to contract or pass HIV/AIDS on to others. Studies also show women and girls who completed secondary education are less exposed to domestic violence and forced sex.

While these positive effects of educating girls start to unfold with the completion of primary education, the capacitation of girls and women to become leaders, examples and informed members of their community enabled to transform their society, only unfolds fully with the progression and completion of secondary education; as it is during adolescence that student's transition from child to adult. In this stage of physical, cognitive and social-emotional development, girls and boys develop a growing capacity for abstract thought, an increased interest in moral reasoning, the sense of life and the future. In line with students' enhanced capacities for abstract thinking, secondary education, teaches not only additional knowledge but many additional skills and abilities such as critical thinking, independent problem resolution and leadership, leading students to feel empowered and reflect upon their knowledge question it and as a consequence alter their behaviour and capacities.

Enhancing the quality of education

The access and quality issues faced in girls' education are alarming, especially in regards to girl's secondary education. The reasons for the development are numerous and vary under the specific contexts. The most common reasons for small enrolment numbers of girls to secondary level are early marriage, child labour, economic reasons (costs of travel, tuition fees, uniforms, books...) driving families to prioritize male siblings, protection issues such as safety in school, safe travel to school and the lack of the communities' support of female education above the literacy level. We can only tackle these issues with quality education in safe learning environments that actually qualifies as a valuable alternative for girls and their respective families and communities.

Balancing quality and access is therefore the crucial exercise of UNHCR's secondary education approach. Only students with a profound secondary education can become leaders and contribute to the development of refugee- and host- communities.

Addressing the gap of girls' secondary education

UNHCR's Global Education Strategy includes the objective to improve access to formal secondary education with a special focus on girls' enrolment and safe learning environments. Yet many operations still believe that it is their main duty to ensure "primary education for all" even if this implies limited investments into secondary education. Investing into primary at the expense of secondary is however a risky bet. It leaves refugee adolescents without prospects and it may also de-motivate parents to send their children to school at all since they do not see where this may lead. The effect materializes with regard to the high dropout rates in the end of primary level. In the context of interdependent education levels the non-prioritization of secondary

⁴ Levine, Ruth, Cynthia B. Lloyd, Margaret Greene, and Caren Grown. Girls Count a Global Investment & Action Agenda: A Girls Count Report on Adolescent Girls', Center for Global Development. Girls Count, 2009, http://www.cgdev.org/files/15154_file_GC_2009_Final_web.pdf

education especially for refugee girls and women is not only worrisome, it also harms the success of primary and tertiary education with regard to the efficiency of the whole education cycle.

Preparing refugee girls for durable solutions

Experience taught us that we have to programme solution oriented during our emergency response in the education field. The approach of the education strategy is therefore to design an education programming with the host governments from the beginning of the emergency on, equipping refugee students for all three durable solutions. Refugee girls that progressed through primary and completed secondary education by the time of repatriation, local integration or resettlement would be able to (re)integrate more easily as they can compete in the labour market, participate in the reconstruction or development of their home or host countries, will be able to play a decision making role in their communities and are provided with the qualification to progress to tertiary education.

The way forward for girls' secondary education

This session will focus on discussing solutions to the obstacles which girls and women face in secondary education. It will also focus on how to strengthen partnership and coordination between UN organizations, NGO's and Ministries of Education in order to achieve concrete and measurable results, expand our networks and enable us to provide refugees with the best options possible, as national Ministries can provide an existing education system and accreditation refugees should profit from. An approach that is theoretically reasonable, yet in the field not always tapped to its potential.

The participants in this panel will be asked to share their thoughts on the questions below in addition to issues raised by the audience:

- How can we create advocacy strategies that ensure girls' secondary education in fragile contexts is taken into account by donors?
- For advocacy to be efficient, it is essential to agree with partners on a common set of priorities. What are the key advocacy messages on girls' education that we want to communicate?
- What incentives can we offer girls' parents and communities to support the education of girls?
- How can we encourage reflection and feedback on what information, guidance and training are required to enhance collaboration and engagement with MoE's on girls' education?
- How can we improve the linkages of existing initiatives of NGOs and UNHCR operations in the field?
- How can we convince governments of the economic gain free secondary education would have on the economic development of their countries?