



## Plenary Report 22 January 2011: Advancing and Empowering Girls and Women in and through Education

**Keynote address: Saniye Gülser Corat, Director for Gender Equality,  
UNESCO**

### Advancing gender equality through education as a basic human right, translating the right to education into rights through education using diverse strategies – investing in high quality education and motivated teachers

Saniye G. Corat presented a comprehensive overview of UNESCO's vision, mission and values in promoting gender equality through and in education supported by ample statistical data and good practice cases from different countries around the globe. She attributed credit to Amartya Sen for demonstrating the holistic benefits of education for empowerment. Education strengthens the position of women in intimate situations. She recounted her personal history of empowerment through good quality education and a vision inspired by her firm conviction that education is a basic human right for all, not a luxury. For UNESCO, gender equality is a global priority, recognizing various shapes of discrimination and marginalization that touch different girls in different ways. She emphasized that equality in education has been repeatedly guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Millennium Development Goals and the Beijing Conference. But many objectives only remain in words. The marginalized are the hardest to reach still. It is now time to renew efforts and achieve promises. Gender is a complex dynamic structure, not a simple dichotomy and as such inequities are hard to address. Gender parity at school can easily mask great inequalities. Equal numbers do not ensure equality in the quality of life or the opportunities available. One missing link in moving from Right to Education to Right through education is the Rights **in** education itself – the quality of education being a fertile ground for women's empowerment. Three dimensions of quality education lie in (i) where the education takes place, (ii) the curriculum, and (iii) the teachers – all must be gender sensitive. UNESCO focuses on both training and professional development of teachers as well as the conditions of work for teachers. Teachers are the most precious resources linking society at large and the children and families and need to be celebrated and kept motivated. The financial crisis is not to be used as an excuse to cut down on educational budgets.

**Conclusion:** “We must train the next generation of teachers for the next generation of students. We must recognize the essential role of teachers in educational environment and the advancement of both women and men. Ensure that there are enough teachers and that teachers enjoy good status, stable and fair salaries and be valued as resources. 2005 goal in education was missed ... ensure to do better by 2015.”



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### **Relevant questions (Q) and comments (C) from the floor and answers from panelists**

**Q.** As an impact of the financial crisis on the MDGs, how much has been mutilated? Will there be fewer rights after this crisis?

**A.** UNESCO invests in education and health. As a result of the recent financial crisis it has been predicted that impact will be negative on girls and women in particular areas. There will be new rounds of cuts and decrease in foreign aids. National governments will need to bridge the gaps. Families will, more often than not, choose to send boys to schools rather than girls in hardship times.

### **Panel Discussion**

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#### **Carolyn Hannan, former Director UN Division for the Advancement of Women: Empowering women and girls through education - gains and gaps – Gender stereotypes in schools and how to remove them through a supportive environment**

Carolyn Hannan first gave a few examples of how schools are operated through stereotypes: girls work harder; boys need more attention because they tend to misbehave; use good girls as buffers for boys who are difficult to control; girls' ability is lower; their feelings of security and satisfaction are also lower; girls' capacity to take leadership roles is questionable; and girls are good only in limited subjects. Such stereotypes can be removed by changes in curricula, gender-responsive school policies, text books without discriminatory language and pictures as well as a variety of roles and function reversals, training, etc. There is low expectation for girls in science and technology. Girls are not accessing ICT to the same extent as boys. Home computers are used more by boys than girls. A range of strategies could be used to counteract this. There could be initiatives to organize science paths for girls in atypical areas, use role models to inspire girls, revise training and teaching materials to make them appropriate and attractive to girls; and work with gifted girls to take leadership roles. A supportive environment for raising self-esteem and confidence boosting could also be created through after-school networks, safe space talking environment, improved library facilities and access to sports and other leisure activities. Girls face harassment and sexual exploitation too.

**Conclusion:** “There should be no room for complacency while dealing with gender stereotypes and violence against girls at school. Every effort must be made to eliminate the disempowering environment that is created through gender stereotypes at school”.

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**Relevant questions (Q) and comments (C) from the floor and answers from panelists**

Q. Girls are not mentioned in sports. Is this a stereotype reinforced in schools? How can we change this?

A. It is true that girls are not seen as competitive sports material – a stereotype. But it is essential to create a positive environment for sports for girls. More access to various sports should be made available. Madagascar shows an example of how girls must swim and climb trees – climate change necessitates that.

Q. How could awareness be increased to put teachers in the center of education and give political space to educators to help eliminate gender stereotypes?

A. The Commission on the Status of Women has come out with a study on “Access to and Participation of Girls in Education” based on information from 89 countries. It was found that 29 percent of all researchers in the world are women; 15 percent in Asia, 40 percent in the Caribbean, 46 percent in Latin America, and the lowest in Africa and Europe. Even women teachers can marginalize girls in mathematics and science in classes. At the tertiary level, girls are getting into areas such as medicine, but engineers are still all male. Also many young women opt out of their education after the Master’s level because of life cycle needs of family rearing. Within the work force too, there is evidently the vertical segregation of occupations and jobs and the glass ceiling.

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**Assibi Napoe, Chair of the Board of the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and Chief Regional Coordinator Africa: Progress through GCE for girls in education - what are the challenges and are we addressing them?**

Assibi Napoe explained that this global campaign has contributed to increased access to education for both girls and boys but the full aim has not been achieved yet. In the Sub Saharan Africa education remains a luxury. Education is still not viewed as a way of securing benefits and getting emancipation or empowerment. It is not considered necessary for girls to get education because husbands can support them. Even after secondary education, girls are trafficked from Western Africa to Central Africa, and to Nigeria to work in coffee plantations. They are often sold as domestic servants and the money thus acquired is used to pay for boys' education. Child trafficking is also a serious problem in Africa. There have been efforts to collect disaggregated data to identify the situation and needs of girls in education. Education Watch programmes have been launched for drawing attention on the need for girls to attend school. There is an urgent need to develop more effective advocacy for girls' education and strengthen the gender dimensions of existing educational institutions and their infrastructure. Pressures are being placed on different countries in Africa to promote education and necessary infrastructure for girls' education.

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**Maki Hayashikawa, Education Specialist UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI)**  
**UNICEF: Advancing the right of girls to education through UNGEI - Collective advocacy and partnerships as strategies for advancement of gender equality in education**

Maki Hayashikawa provided a brief overview of the strategies used by UNGEI to help advance girls' education. UNGEI was launched in 2000 in Dakar, Senegal and focuses on the critical importance of prioritizing girls' education in order to narrow gender gaps in primary and secondary education so as to achieve the goal set out for 2015. In the First Global Declaration on Gender Equality and Empowerment, the aim expressed was to make gender equality in education a higher priority both internally and externally within the broader concept of gender equality. Collective advocacy is a very strong strategy advocated and used. Strategic partnerships with local communities, civil society and other stakeholders are used as an anchorage to leverage influences on governments and academic institutions. This collective action is undertaken on an equal footing. There is a serious need for recognition of the critical role played by teachers. Teachers are seen as providing highly feminized care. Unless all teachers are made more aware of gender issues, education may suffer from lack of gender sensitivity and gender responsive-ness in its teaching methods and treatment of students, both girls and boys.

**Conclusion: “We must focus on strategic partnerships with community, civil society and other stakeholders to help achieve the educational goals of gender equality in education set out for 2015.”**

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**Relevant questions (Q) and comments (C) from the floor and answers from panelists**

Q. In Haiti, 50 percent of children have never entered schools. Now more than a million people are without income. The situation has worsened. Sexual harassment is rampant. The impact of political conflicts and other natural disasters have combined to create this disastrous situation. How can we collaborate with NGOs to bring about solution and support to this situation?

A. Efforts must be made with partners to identify and solidify the right methodology for empowering of both male and female teachers with gender skills. Creating a safe environment for girls is crucial. Equally important is involving men and boys and create a school context to ensure safety and security. We must ensure that the learning feeds into educational policies – be “projectified”. We need to create a synergy between experience and policies.

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**Stella Maldonado, General Secretary, CTERA Argentina: Indivisibility of human rights needs to be respected. Right to Education will be achieved only if all other rights are equally promoted**

Stella Maldonado brought in a different perspective to bear on achieving the Right to Education. She argued in her presentation that Right to Health, Right to Work, Right to Security and Protection are all related dimensions of a social environment that needs to be created to achieve the Right to Education. She emphasized on the importance of strengthening the unions to look at the political perspectives of educational policies and social inclusion. Network linkages should create synergy always in a specific direction, otherwise there would be chaos. Institutional and educational practices for gender equality need to be closely scrutinized. It is not enough only to focus on inclusion and participation of all girls. It is equally important to ensure that the fight against violence and sexual stereotypes continue consistently. Quality education is possible if we do away with practices of teachers doing multiple jobs because there are no assurances of good salary and good health benefits. **Working conditions for teachers must be included in our collective bargaining process.** **The organizations of unions must be stronger to address all these issues.** Decent working conditions are absolutely essential to produce good learning and teaching environment. Early child education is as equally important as teenagers to continue education. Many leave schools to look after their siblings.

**Conclusion:** “Promotion of social justice is possible only through recognition of indivisibility of rights. Right to Education is achievable only by simultaneous promotion of all other rights. Unions must struggle to be influential both at national and global levels.”

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### Floor Discussion

*Notes on discussions that do not fall under the issues above*

**Need for strengthening of unions should be our principal focus**

C. Issues of equality and development are of great importance to unions. There is a serious need to strengthen the unions as a way of re-enforcing solidarity. We must consider and identify ways unions must take to strengthen gender equality in education.

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**Under-achievement of boys has become a matter for concern in some regions**

Q. We need to consider issues related to the Caribbean. The critical issue there is under achievement of boys. Boys are involved in crimes. Underperforming of boys has become a matter for serious concern. How do we keep stereotypes and low performance of boys without cultural blame on female teachers?



A. We should not get into the culture of blaming. Feminization of teaching profession prevails only in some parts of the world. In other parts of the world, there is a shortage of teachers. In Central Asia, there is a pattern of more females in tertiary education and more males opting out of tertiary education. So the situation differs from region to region.

A. We must look at under-achievement through the gender perspective as well as the women's perspective. We need to look at causes of those under-achievements, region specific and context specific and find the right kinds of strategies. However, under-achievement of boys should not be addressed at the expense of girls.

A. It is true that in South East Asia too more boys are dropping out of school at earlier stages. We need to look towards employment for solution, where education makes sense. For girls too, they may be highly educated but are not able to secure good jobs. So, we need to also deal with long term objectives in mind.

A. We need to keep in mind that the majority of illiterate in the world are still women. There is a need to balance the two. We could try to introduce gender equality perspective through two parallel processes and gender specific programming.

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### **Standardized evaluation methods are essential for ensuring good quality education**

C. We need to discuss policies on how to standardize evaluation methods to assess the quality of education being delivered. Unless we have standardized parameters for measurement, it is difficult to ensure the quality of education as good or not good enough.

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### **Ensure that gender knowledge and values become part of teacher training**

**Unions must strongly advocate the need for all teacher training to include sessions on an understanding of gender dynamics and gender values. Quality education becomes possible only with teachers equipped with gender-sensitive values, attitudes and knowledge.** All declarations and outcomes of research must be translated into action. Only teachers are in a position to ensure that gender perspectives are included in all aspects of their teaching and interactions with boys and girls.

C. Palestine is facing a tremendous challenge to provide education for both girls and boys. Due to the difficulties and dangers of passing through check posts, Parents are not allowing girls to go to schools and universities. Some have been compelled to rent rooms near the educational institutes. How can we improve the education of girls in this setting!!!