



**Education International's
First World Women's Conference (20-23 January 2011)**

**Talking points on "Advancing the right of girls to education through UNGEI"
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Introduction:

- Congratulations to Education International for taking the initiative of this conference on a pertinent topic; gender in education cannot be achieved without commitment/active participation of teachers. I wish to convey the warm greetings of UNGEI Global Advisory Committee, which has asked me to report on the outcomes of this conference end of this month at the GAC meeting in Paris (31 January 2011).
- UNGEI – the United Nations Girls Education Initiative is one of the Education for All (EFA) Flagship initiatives launched in 2000 in Dakar, Senegal, at the World Education Forum by then UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan.
- It is a network of partners at the global, regional, national and sub-national levels, to promote girls education and working towards gender equality 'to' education, 'in' education and 'through' education. The partnership embraces the UN system, governments, donor countries, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector, as well as communities and families in the case of country-level partnerships.
- UNGEI provides partners and stakeholders with a platform for action: to create and advance a movement to increase awareness among all stakeholders in education on the critical importance of prioritizing girls' education and gender equality in education, and to take concrete actions to narrow the gender gap in primary and secondary education so as to ensure that by 2015, that all children complete primary schooling with girls and boys having equal access to all levels of education.
- in May Last year, 2010, UNGEI celebrated its 10th anniversary in Dakar Senegal, , where over 200 country delegates participated to review the achievements over the decade as well as identify remaining challenges and sketched out the future direction of UNGEI.
- The participants reaffirmed their commitment to work together in partnership to realize the right of all girls to education and accelerating national efforts to achieve the EFA Goals (especially Goal 5) and MDGs 2 & 3 by 2015.
- Conference concluded in Dakar Declaration on Accelerating Girls' Education and Gender Equality, first global declaration on this topic. Declaration called for "urgent action in support of girls' rights to education, gender equality and empowerment opportunities", noting that such interventions "must be multi-sectoral, and education policies, strategies, plans and budgets must be gender-responsive." Copies of the Declaration are available ...
- In the East Asia Pacific region, the regional EAP UNGEI was formed in 2002 to echo the global commitment to both EFA Goal (Goal 5) and Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) (Goal 3) and to



support regional countries to achieve gender parity by 2005 and gender equality in education by 2015. The EAP UNGEI, which is the only regional UNGEI currently formed and functioning with over 20 partner members, has been coming together for strategic interventions at the regional level to mainstream gender into education policies, strategies and plans at both regional and national levels, and working actively together to broaden and harmonize efforts for gender equality in education under the EFA framework and MDGs.

- UNGEI partnerships at the country level are active in other regions, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where the Forum of Women Educationalist (FAWE) has been closely collaborating with UNICEF to provide leadership to the UNGEI network. In many African countries, girls' education partnership has been formalized under the leadership of the ministry of education.

Partnership and Advocacy as UNGEI strategies and actions:

- Now, in this brief contribution, I would like to stress two keywords that describes best UNGEI's mission for advancing the right of girls to education and gender equality in education, i.e. "**partnership**" and "**advocacy**".
- "**Partnership**" is at the very heart of UNGEI's action and is where UNGEI's strength lies. UNGEI is not an agency, but more like a network and also certainly not the ONLY network that is working for the cause of girls' education and gender equality.
- When the initiative was launched in 2000, girls' education was already on the agenda of many of our partners who work so closely together today. What UNGEI at global, regional and national levels has done and continues to do, is to help partner agencies to make gender in education a priority both internally and externally.
- Through forming a strong partnership, agencies that could have been working separately and often times in isolation, were brought together for a common cause under the UNGEI banner and made concerted efforts for effective intervention on more formal platforms at national and regional levels. In other words, UNGEI as a partnership of multiple stakeholders with their respective comparative advantages and vast experiences, has been able to bring to policy discussions strategic influence on government policies and programmes not only on girls education, but also policies on inclusive education (Lao PDR), early childhood education (e.g. Afghanistan), school constructions (e.g. Afghanistan), sector plan evaluation and EFA assessments (EAP region) in ensuring gender mainstreaming and gender analysis in these areas.
- Collective "**Advocacy**" (mostly at the policy level) is the other keyword which has made UNGEI unique and become a strong force in the EFA movement and MDGs promotion. It is certainly difficult to attribute any progress made towards achieving the EFA Goals (especially Goal 5) and MDGs 2 and 3 specifically to UNGEI as an independent initiative, especially since UNGEI is a partnership composed of a number of different organizations and networks, but all working towards achieving a common goal: gender equality in education. However, UNGEI has been able to take advantage of its unique structure to advocate for advancing girls' right to education and gender equality in education with a collective voice and help maximize the contributions of the individual agencies.



- A collective voice will carry weight compared to just having one agency advocating for the cause. A collective voice will also help avoid unnecessarily misunderstanding and confusion on gender equality issues which can be very complex and value-laden.
- UNGEI's collective advocacy for policy change and gender-responsive environment in education has led to increased awareness among key stakeholders, enhancing synergy among stakeholders regarding approaches and initiatives for girls/ education, which in turn, led to the development of gender mainstreaming and analysis tools and guidelines for planning, assessment and reviews.

Challenges and limitations of UNGEI:

- Partnership and collective advocacy have been both a strategy and *raison d'être* of UNGEI and just having one or is other would have not made what UNGEI is today. Reviewing its decade-long journey, it is clear that UNGEI has faced and continue to face, a number of challenges and limitations at different levels, aspects and scope.
- For example, the functioning and activities of UNGEI are quite different at national, regional and global levels and degree of commitment and ownership by partners has been varied. Resources have also been a challenge especially at the regional and national level with no specific funding for UNGEI activities from any of the partner agencies. In some countries and regions, the partnership base has been narrow and has not succeeded in including partners other than development and international agencies, which has led to the exclusion of some potential partners that could have been strategic actors in promoting UNGEI's cause.
- In many instances, the partnership has been more successful at the global and regional levels than at the country level. In order to become more effective and active at the country level, the identified challenges need to be addressed and rectified as a matter of urgency. There are only 5 years to go till the deadline of EFA and MDGs!

Teachers – the key actors for pushing forward the UNGEI's agenda to 2015:

- If the goals of gender parity and gender equality in education are to be met, UNGEI must be strengthened and become more effective in its partnership functioning and collective advocacy for policy change and leveraging resources, especially at the national level.
- One group of key potential partners in UNGEI movement that seems to absent are the **teachers** – as individuals and as a civil society group, e.g., teachers unions and associations. In South and West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa regions, there are some countries with local/national teacher associations involved in UNGEI activities. However, at the EAP regional level, the EAP UNGEI partnership currently does not have any partner that is concerned with teachers as a member nor do we have any national level teacher associations/unions on our mailing list.
- While there is official awareness and recognition of the critical role teachers play in promoting gender equality in education and ensuring the right of girls and boys to quality education, there is very little policy and/or practice to follow the official statements. It is also particularly critical for the EAP region today to address the gender issue in the teaching profession, where the education sector



is characterized by its highly feminized cadre. Recent studies¹ in the region have found that a feminized teaching force has not necessarily proven to have positive impact on gender equality, and when low status and quality of female teachers also continue to prevail throughout the Asia-Pacific region, female teachers are not always a role model for girls, whom we are trying to empower through education. On the other hand, when teachers are well trained in gender sensitive teaching, there have been positive results from limited cases on the learning process and outcomes for both girls and boys².

- It is thus one key issue that the regional UNGEI in EAP would like to bring more attention to, not just for the sake of EFA Goal 5 and MDG3, but for achieving all the 6 EFA goals and all the 8 MDGs. After all, gender is a cross-cutting theme for all development concerns.

¹ UNESCO-Ochanomizu University, Regional study on Status and quality of female teachers” in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Mongolia, 2009-2010.

² National studies by Ministry of Education, Lao PDR: “Situation analysis of ethnic and girls’ education” (2005), and “Girls domestic work and its impact on their education opportunities” (2008).