Education International' s World Women's Conference: "On the Move for Equality"
Bangkok, 20-23 January 2011

Empowering women and girls through education: Gains and gaps
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at the Panel Discussion on
"*Advancing and empowering Girls and Women in and through Education*"

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I am pleased to participate in this first World Women's Conference on the education of women and girls and I congratulate Educational International on this important initiative**.** Educational International is again taking the lead internationally in ensuring the development of creative strategies for improving the situation of women and girls in education.

A critical issue on the international agenda

The education of women and girls has been given significant attention on the international agenda over the past 10-15 years. Many critical mandates and concrete recommendations for improving the situation have already been put in place. The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, for example, established education and training as one of 12 Critical Areas of Concern in the *Beijing Platform for Action* for the achievement of gender equality. The recommendations on education made in the *Platform* have been systematically followed-up in 2000, 2005 and most recently in 2010, and Member States have reported on progress made. In 2005, the United Nations Millennium Summit also established education as one of eight Millennium Goals, and included the education of women and girls as one of the three indicators for achievement of Millennium Goal Three on gender equality and empowerment of women.

The right of all children to education that is free from discrimination and of a sufficient quality to enable their full participation in society is, in addition, enshrined in major international human rights treaties. In particular, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) made the promotion of free primary education and quality education for children and youth up to the age of 18 years an obligation for States. In its Article 10, The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – CEDAW* (1979) obliges States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure equal rights with men in the field of education.

Education of women and girls is one of the very few areas of gender equality where specific global targets have been established. Already in 1990, one of the six goals established at the World Conference on Education, held here in Thailand, was for the equal enrolment of girls and boys at primary and secondary level by 2005, and for all girls and boys to have equal opportunity to basic education of high quality, to achieve at equal levels and to enjoy equal benefits of education, by 2015. These goals were reiterated in the *Beijing Platform for Action* in 1995. The Millennium Development Goals also called for equality at primary and secondary level by 2005 and the elimination of all disparity in education by 2015.

While many efforts and much progress has have been made, the first target date of 2005 passed without the achievement of the critical goals set. Despite the recognition of education as a fundamental right for all, and awareness of the tremendous wide-ranging benefits of education, as well as its critical impact on gender equality and empowerment of women, women and girls still face discrimination in access to education in many parts of the world. Millions of girls continue to be out of the formal education system and more than 70 countries have failed to achieve gender parity in primary education. Recommendations and targets do not, by themselves, automatically bring about change. Considerable effort and resources are needed to ensure implementation.

Broadening the focus to secondary level and moving beyond access

It has often been stated that education is not a panacea for addressing gender inequality. This is no doubt true – education by itself cannot address all gender discrimination and inequality. But it is important to recognize that education is certainly one of the most critical first steps towards equality. Education can have tremendous benefits for women, above all by increasing their recognition of their rights and their capacity to address discrimination and inequality in different aspects of their lives. Education can, for example, increase their income-earning potential, their ability to bargain for resources, their decision-making autonomy, their participation in public life, and their control over their own lives, including their fertility.

Most of the focus on education to date has been on access and achievement at primary school level. There is, however, increased concern about the situation of girls in secondary education. Enrolment ratios for girls in secondary education remain low in some regions. In 2006, a United Nations Taskforce on Millennium Development Goal Three (Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women) came to the conclusion that post-primary education has the greatest pay-offs for the empowerment of women and girls by making it possible for women to access a wide range of opportunities in the economic, political, and community spheres. The labour-market return of post-primary education is higher than that of primary education, increasing women's rate of participation in formal sectors. Secondary education was also found to have significant effects on the health and physical integrity of women and girls.

Initially, the main focus in efforts to improve the situation of women and girls in education was primarily on access and enrolment. There has been, however, increased awareness that the empowerment of women and girls through education does not occur automatically through improved access and increased enrolment. There is, today, greater recognition of the fact that the quality and appropriateness of educational content, the methods and materials used, and the perceptions/ attitudes of actors involved, as well as the receptiveness of the broader social environment to girls' education, are also essential. Inappropriate educational policies, curricula, materials, teaching methods, and school environments, as well as gender-insensitive teachers, can actually make education disempowering for girls and women. The relevance of educational curricula to the individual and to society at large, the appropriateness of educational content and materials, and gender-sensitive attitudes by teachers, school administrators, parents and community leaders are critical factors ensuring that education contributes positively to the empowerment of girls.

A recent Swedish study on gender equality in schools concluded that, even after 50 years of efforts, gender equality has not yet been achieved in schools in Sweden. Access to education has improved and girls are achieving well, in many cases even out-performing

boys.[1] Many girls, are, however, not happy in schools and do not feel good about themselves, particularly because of exposure to bullying and harassment. Girls experience stress, lack of satisfaction and poor self identity. Schools are not ensuring girls' wellbeing, let alone their empowerment. As one newspaper editorial on the release of the study commented last week, "This is educational achievement at too great a cost for girls." Clearly, we need to think beyond access, retention and even beyond issues of achievement, to include serious attention to the ways schools can empower girls to develop positive self-esteem and social identities.

Empowerment through education

It is important to understand what empowerment through education means and how it can be achieved. In 2007, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (2007) urged Governments to ensure provision of a number of key elements for empowering education for girls, including:

- Gender sensitive and empowering educational processes, methods and materials;
- Safe and supportive school environments and girl-friendly premises;
- Elimination of gender stereotypes;
- Programmes which enable girls to develop skills, capacities and expertise to exercise leadership;
- Increased access to science and technology, including ICT;
- Increased ability to attend school and extra-curricula programmes through investment in public infrastructure and services to reduce girls' household work, as well as development of programmes to change attitudes on the division of labour between men and women and boys and girls; and
- Well-resourced livelihood skills programmes to reach those girls not in formal education

In my presentation I will discuss gains and gaps in relation to one particular strategy to increase potential for education to empower girls and women, i.e. ensuring that gender stereotypes are not perpetuated and exacerbated through education. I will also raise, in less detail, two related strategies – creating a supportive school environment and addressing the disempowering impact of violence against girls.

a) *Eliminating gender stereotypes in education*

Identifying and challenging gender stereotypes is probably one of the most important strategies for ensuring that education is empowering for women and girls. Stereotypes in

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[1] A gender equality perspective on education requires attention to the priorities and needs of both women and men and boys and girls. The fact that, in many contexts today, boys are underachieving is a serious problem and must be specifically addressed. This requires context-specific analysis of causes and consequences and the development of specific strategies. It must be kept in mind, however, that attention to the underperformance of boys must not be at the expense of attention to the empowerment of girls. In particular, increased resources for efforts to improve boys' performance must not lead to a reduction of funds for girls' empowerment as has unfortunately happened in some contexts. It is important to keep the long-term educational perspective in mind, i.e. the fact that in many countries where girls outperform boys, girls do not necessarily gain improved access to the benefits and outcomes of education. They may be achieving well, but due to persistent inequalities, girls do not necessarily gain access to decent work, or to employment consistent with their levels of educational achievement. In the context of this conference, with its focus on the education and empowerment of women, this presentation will not address the issue of boy's achievements but will focus on girls' empowerment.

education were highlighted as a major problem by many Member States reporting on their progress oi implementing the *Beijing Platform for Action* in 2009. More than half of the Member States (61 of 120) which indicated that stereotypes were a constraint to the achievement of gender equality specifically raised the negative impacts in the education system. A recent in-depth Commonwealth Secretariat study in four countries (India, Malaysia, Seychelles and Trinidad and Tobago) also confirmed that educational processes can reinforce and strengthen gender stereotypes rather than challenge them.

Member States reporting to the United Nations raised the issue of stereotyping in socialization processes which influence access to and specialisation in education, as well as career options. They also noted the impact of stereotypes in educational processes themselves – in curricula, textbooks and other teaching materials and in teacher guides and methods – including impact on self-confidence and self-identity of girls which, in the long-term, affects subject specialization and career choices. Particular concerns in the areas of science and mathematics and in relation to ICT were raised.

A range of different types of stereotypes have been identified specifically in the education sector, with varying negative implications for the education and empowerment of girls and women. Teacher expectations have a significant impact on student performance. Common stereotypes related to expectations for girls include: *restricted expectations on educational aspirations and outcomes for girls* (in some contexts, for example, the expectation that girls do not need education as much as boys as they will not seek employment but are destined to be housewives); *beliefs on inherent propensities (or lack thereof) for different subjects* (such as the belief that boys are better at mathematics and science than girls, and that girls are more suited for social/cultural subjects than boys); and *limited aspirations for girls in relation to career choices* (illustrated in career guidance attitudes which steer girls towards the 'soft' social sectors -based on the fact that they are girls rather than on their interests and capabilities- while boys are generally encouraged to seek employment in science and technology and in political and economical spheres).

A consequence of these types of stereotypes may be that those girls who take science or mathematics, those who –against all odds - excel at these subjects, and those who even aspire to seek careers in male dominated areas, are seen as 'unfeminine' because they are not conforming to the expected gender stereotypes. Such girls may face harassment as a result, which is significantly disempowering. 'Gifted' girls in these areas are not given the opportunity to reach their full potential.The direct consequences of such stereotypes can be seen in imbalances between girls and boys in subject specialization at secondary and tertiary levels, and, in the longer term, in career choices. In some countries, women constitute less than one third of students in science and over two thirds in the humanities, social sciences and health fields.

The low expectations of teachers regarding the capacity and achievement of girls can result in tendencies to give more resources and feedback to boys. The fact that girls do well may be automatically presumed by teachers to be linked to that fact that they work hard rather than to their intellectual capacities. Studies have shown that teachers generally give more attention to boys, often also because boys are seen (and accepted) as more 'demanding' and having a 'tendency to misbehave if bored'. The related stereotype that girls are "good' and "well-behaved' has led to a disturbing practice by some teachers to use 'good' girls as buffers among boys who are difficult to control. This exposes girls to considerable harassment and reduces further their capacity to participate fully in the classroom and is, thus,

a significantly disempowering practice. Gender stereotypes also exist in relation to sports and extra-curricula activities.

The education system can reinforce and exacerbate common existing stereotypes in society – for example, those reproduced by the media, which show women active in a limited very range of areas (often social and cultural fields) and even question women's propensity for leadership, and which, in contrast, always present men in positions of power and influence (usually in relation to politics, the economy, science and technology and sport). These stereotypes are perpetuated and exacerbated through obsolete and gender-insensitive educational curricula and textbooks and other teaching materials, as well as through insensitive teacher attitudes and teaching methods.

A thorough gender-sensitive review of school environments to ensure the elimination of gender stereotypes would require attention to educational policies, curricula, textbooks and materials and teacher training and in-service programmes, as well as school management practices. Revision of educational curriculum would require, among other things, eliminating requirements that prevent girls and boys from choosing all available subjects and specializations. Reviewing textbooks from a gender perspective requires eliminating messages that reproduce sexist stereotypes or do not provide a balanced portrayal of the skills and functions of both women and men; deleting discriminatory language and images; and providing positive illustrations of gender equality and the role and contributions of women as well as men. Common actions to improve education materials also include increasing the numbers of women and girl characters; portraying role-reversals showing both boys and girls and women and men in a-typical roles and functions; increasing the portrayal of women in the public sphere in decision-making and leadership roles; and placing greater emphasis on women's intellectual and professional capabilities.

Stereotypes on science and technology and ICT:

Persistent stereotypes on science and technology, and emerging stereotypes on information and communication technologies (ICT), are particularly critical to address. In an age of rapidly developing technology, it is important that both girls and boys have equal access to / benefits from education on science and technology. Evidence shows, however, that girls in all parts of the world are less motivated to pursue studies in science and technology and have lower achievement levels in these areas than boys, owing to low expectations and stereotypical attitudes. In some cases, this is partly a result of insensitive vocational guidance which builds on prevailing gender stereotypes on the roles of women and men. The limited participation of girls in science and technology education has serious implications on the empowerment of girls and young women and on their future professional and career development.

In the information society, it is also critical that girls and women have equal access to opportunities to participate in and benefit from the new ICT. ICT provide unique opportunities for girls' empowerment by improving access to information on health, nutrition, education, and other human development opportunities. They also create new opportunities for social interaction, including peer and bottom-up communication. Research has revealed, however, that fewer girls than boys access and use ICT, and girls continue to be underrepresented in ICT courses, computer clubs and ICT-based careers. They risk being left behind in this new arena and losing access to an empowering tool which offers new spaces and opportunities for learning. In the United States it has been estimated that boys are five times more likely than girls to use home computers, and parents spend twice as much on ICT

products for their sons as they do for their daughters. Strategies and action plans are needed at all levels to ensure equal access to and benefits of ICT, starting from an early age.

Inequality exists in access to ICT in both formal education and in extra-curricula activities organized by schools. It is important for schools to recognize that girls may not own personal computers to the same extent boys do and that they do not have the same capacity to access community-based facilities. Unequal sharing of domestic responsibilities leads to limited free-time for girls, and the costs involved, the location of the facilities and their opening hours (with possible security risks for women and girls), may restrict girls' use of communal facilities. In addition, there may be a lack of appropriate content available for girls. In efforts to increase girls' empowerment, schools must take these limitations into account and ensure that the school environment – in formal classes and extra-curricula activities - compensates for the inequalities faced by girls.

Tackling stereotypes:

The 2009 responses of Member States on their efforts to implement the *Beijing Platform for Action* provided information on the different strategies used to challenge and combat stereotypes, although not in great detail. Some noted the difficulties in challenging persistent stereotypes and aligning the contents of textbooks and other educational materials with the principles of gender equality and with the real roles/functions of women and men.

By far the most common strategy in all regions has been the regulation, review and revision of educational curricula and teaching materials. Considerable guidance has been provided on ways to identify negative stereotypes, encourage positive representation of diverse gender roles for both women and men, and avoid stereotypical depictions of families, occupations and activities. Countries in all regions have also, for many years, made considerable efforts to address stereotypes through teacher training (including in-service training) and teacher guides. Some countries have established regular monitoring mechanisms to ensure all teaching processes and materials are gender-sensitive.

A number of other innovative strategies have emerged in the past decade. These include the incorporation of the goal to eliminate gender stereotypes in education as part of national Education Policies and/or Gender Equality Policies. Some countries have made efforts to formally align the national education policy with the principles of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

A number of countries have introduced specific research projects on gender stereotypes in education and organized conferences, roundtables and workshops. Targeted projects to combat stereotypes in education have been established, and specific manuals and teaching materials developed to guide teachers in dealing with stereotypes. Methods for addressing stereotypes with students at different educational levels have been introduced, such as lesson plans and practical exercises, books, comic books, games, and TV slots. Programmes in Sweden, UK and Canada, for example, challenge the gender stereotypes which disempower girls, including through sexual harassment and abuse, by using interesting and provocative practical classroom exercises.

The importance of addressing stereotypes at an early age is well recognized in many countries. Research, training and development of educational materials at kindergarten level aim to raise awareness among teachers of persistent but often unrecognized gender

stereotypes, and to provide inspiration for developing more gender-sensitive approaches. A creative approach was taken in Sweden through filming the interactions of teachers at kindergarten level to highlight the subtle, and often unrecognized, expectations and treatment of boys and girls, which result in the prioritization of boys over girls. The increased use of male teachers at kindergarten and primary school levels is another effort to decrease stereotypes at this level.

Awareness has also increased on the importance of working more broadly with gender equality issues in educational contexts. This has led to the introduction of gender equality courses at different levels, particularly secondary and tertiary levels, and the establishment of specific gender research centres at tertiary level in some countries.

Particular attention has been given to developing initiatives to increase the interest in and access of girls to science and technology, including ICT. Specific initiatives have been introduced in some countries to promote non-traditional career choices for both boys and girls and efforts made to ensure career-guidance is gender-sensitive. Some programmes target industry to ensure a-typical work experiences and internships for girls. Training teachers in gender-sensitivity, revising textbooks to include women scientists as role models and mentors, and setting up science camps and coaching are other measures developed to enhance girls' potential in science and technology. The Commission on the Status of Women has recognized the importance of education on science and technology for the empowerment of women and girls by making it the priority theme for its annual session this year. The Commission will, in the course of its deliberations, give attention to the risks and impacts of gender stereotypes in this area.

More recent innovative efforts have also included research and guidance on working in a non-stereotypical manner with gifted students, and actively developing leadership roles among both girls and boys. Increased attention is also given to stereotypes in out-of-school activities, including sports, and to a more equitable sharing of resources between girls and boys.

International and regional organizations have also taken action to support the work of governments in eliminating gender stereotypes in education. UNESCO has, for example, developed a comprehensive manual '*Promoting Gender Equality Through Textbooks: A Methodological Guide'* which aims to support the identification of stereotypes and provide practical tools for the gender-sensitive revision and use of educational textbooks to ensure promotion of gender equality and empowerment through education.

Specific recommendations on combating gender stereotypes in both formal and non-formal education were contained in the Action Plan "*Taking up the challenge of the achievement of de jure and de facto gender equality"*(developed at a recent Council of Europe Ministerial-level Conference on gender equality - May 2010), including the encouragement of non-sexist language, in particular in national official documents.

b) *Creating a supportive school environment for girls*

A second critical issue for empowerment of girls through education is creating a supportive school environment, one which is gender-sensitive and girl-friendly. It is important to identify what specific elements are needed if a school environment is to be conducive to building self-confidence and self-esteem among girls and providing them with the tools needed to know and demand their rights and fulfil their aspirations, which may be

kept hidden in disempowering environments. There is a great deal of diversity in the situation of girls around the world but attention to the empowerment of aspects of education is needed in schools all around the world. Girls in rich/developed countries can also face significant discrimination and are equally in need of empowering environments in schools.

Empowerment during early adolescence needs particular attention as girls at this stage in their lives may find that their worlds "shrink" significantly. In some contexts, their mobility may be considerably restricted as they reach puberty and parents fear for their security/safety. Some girls may be withdrawn from school completely, and even forced into early marriage. Those who continue in school may be more confined to the home and have less access to their peers and friends. At this age, many girls are expected to take on more responsibility for household work which also curtails their freedom. They miss social interaction with other girls as a consequence of their increased isolation. They can experience confusion at being "left out" or "left behind", which can have a negative impact on their self-esteem and confidence and, thus, be very disempowering.

Girls aged 10-14 often 'fall through the cracks' in terms of policy attention. Inputs for young children do not reach these girls and many youth programmes target older girls from around 16-15. It is important to break the 'policy invisibility' of this group of vulnerable girls and actively address their priorities and needs and ensure their empowerment. This requires addressing the often low levels of expectations for girls which are internalized by girls themselves, as well as the lack of opportunities for developing self-esteem.

Education can play a critical empowering role in providing skills and capabilities, opportunities for sport and recreation, as well as opportunities for developing social networks and 'safe spaces' which create inspiration for exploring new ideas and develop positive social identities. Schools can provide 'safe spaces' outside the classroom context where girls can meet to discuss common issues and experience positive peer exchange. Innovative strategies have included the creation of 'after-school groups' and networks of girls, as well as mentorship programmes where older girls and young women provide guidance and inspiration.

Schools should be encouraged to think creatively about developing leadership skills as an essential part of the empowerment of girls. Greater attention has to be given to developing capacities for decision-making and participation in public/civic life for girls. A critical element is ensuring that school environments themselves are open and democratic, and that student participation and voice is encouraged. Many commendable efforts are being made to develop the leadership of girls and give them increased 'voice in school environments'. An innovative UNICEF project covering 18 schools in Madagascar aims to ensure girls' education promotes gender equality and empowerment. Awareness-raising on the potential of girls' education is one important goal, achieved through development of communication materials for girls and teachers as well as for parents and the wider community. Materials include brochures as well as videos and short radio spots. Increasing the role of girls in the school environment is another goal. Girls were encouraged to discuss what would be required for the transformation of education for them through a 'school improvement plan'. Practical proposals included language clubs, improved library facilities and increased access to sports. Important project inputs also include information and training for teachers on the special situation and needs of girls, as well as capacity-building inputs to strengthen learning outcomes for girls through increasing teachers' knowledge and access to appropriate teaching aids.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has undertaken innovative work on ensuring the whole school environment is gender-sensitive – looking beyond the classroom contexts to encompass wider school processes, and school management approaches. To make schools more democratic and equitable environments, conducive to the empowerment of girls as well as boys, '*The gender responsive school: An action guide*' has been prepared, based on the findings of a pilot project in India, Malaysia, the Seychelles and Trinidad and Tobago. This project stressed the importance of providing non-threatening spaces for debate, respectful provocation and deep reflection.

One important step in girls' empowerment in schools can be increasing the recruitment of women teachers. With proper motivation and training, women teachers can serve as positive mentors and role models for girls. Not all women teachers are, however, automatically good mentors or role models. Both women and men teachers need special training to develop understanding of the challenges girls face in the school setting and potential strategies for supporting them. In creating a girl friendly environment in schools, it is also important to engage boys (as students and brothers) and men (as fathers and teachers) in questioning traditional gender norms and holding men and boys accountable for discrimination and violence against girls in the school setting.

In some country contexts, promoting the empowerment of girls through education requires efforts by schools to create positive attitudes to girls' education in the broader social environment. Given their perceived leadership roles in communities, schools can play an active positive role in fostering such attitudes. In relation to the obstacle posed for girls by the heavy and unequal burden of household work, schools can initiate discussions of possible community-level initiatives to alleviate this problem, such as the establishment of day care centres and pre-schools for younger siblings and improving the supply of accessible water or fuel. A largely unexplored solution is promoting a more equitable division of household tasks among girls and boys. School administrators and teachers can also highlight for parents and community leaders, in different ways, the positive effects of girls' education and propose measures to be taken within the schools to foster girls' access and retention, such as flexible schedules, double sessions, and evening school hours.

Issues of economic security – particularly for girls living in poverty or in rural areas – may also need to be specifically addressed by schools in efforts to empower girls. The livelihood security of girls in the context of HIV/AIDs, for example, needs explicit attention. Economic disempowerment and insecurity forces many girls to make risky choices, often involving sexual abuse.

c) *Eliminating disempowering violence through creation of a safe and secure environment*

Security is a key issue in relation to the empowering nature of the school environment. The fact that schools can be disempowering spaces for girls, in particular by exposing them to harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse, needs to be explicitly recognized and addressed.

Recent path-breaking United Nations studies on violence (2006) – on violence against children and on violence against women – noted that girls are more prone to be victims of violence, including sexual harassment and abuse, than boys. In some contexts, girls are often at risk in contexts where they should feel safe – in homes, schools and communities, and at the hands of those who are charged with their welfare, including teachers and school

administrators. Violence against women constitutes a significant obstacle to access to education and negatively affects educational performance at all levels – primary, secondary, tertiary, as well as in adult education, and impacts negatively on empowerment processes..

The intersection between violence and education for girls takes place at three levels – girls can be witnesses to violence at home; they can be victims of violence at home or in communities; and they can be victims of violence in the school context. Girls who witness violence in their homes or other contexts may develop emotional and behavioural problems that adversely affect their educational performance. Research indicates the children of women victims of violence, who witness such violence, are affected in terms of their health, their educational performance and their use of violence in their own lives. They may exhibit more anxiety, depression, trauma symptoms and temperament problems than other children. Exposure to chronic violence is associated with lower cognitive functioning and poor school performance. A study in Nicaragua found that children of female victims of violence left school an average of four years earlier than other children.

Girls who are themselves victims of different forms of violence suffer a range of negative repercussions, including depression, suicidal tendencies, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, sexual dysfunction, substance abuse, HIV infection and reproductive health problems. These repercussions impact directly on both access to and performance in school and empowerment processes. Discriminatory social and cultural practices that constitute acts of violence against girls - such as early marriage, domestic service, and female genital mutilation - also curtail and sometimes completely stop girls' empowerment through education.

Harassment and violence in school environments can curtail girls' access to education and negatively impact their educational performance and be significantly disempowering. While schools are meant to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children, for many girls they represent a security risk. A common form of school-based violence is bullying which may include sexual harassment, and physical or sexual assault. Perpetrators may be male students or teachers and other school personnel. In research undertaken by the American Association of University Women, 83 percent of girls in grades 8 through 11 in public schools in the United States reported exposure to some form of harassment. In Malawi, 50 percent of school girls surveyed said that they had been touched in an inappropriate sexual manner by teachers or schoolboys.

Where schools are at a distance from homes, and transport is erratic or not available, girls may face considerable harassment and abuse on their way to and from school. In some contexts, the lack or inadequacy of sanitation facilities for girls in schools increases risks of harassment and abuse, and is an important factor contributing to the high rates of absenteeism and drop-out rates among girls. Parents are reluctant to send their girls to schools where they may face sexual harassment. Research has also indicated that considerable numbers of girls in all regions of the world face sexual harassment and exploitation in the context of sport – an area where girls were presumed to be safe. A study in Denmark, for example, indicated that 25 per cent under the age of 18 reported harassment or knowing someone close to them who had been harassed.

There can be no room for complacency in relation to the impact of harassment and abuse on girls' empowerment, even in rich developed countries. The situation is not static and new forms of discrimination, inequality and violence are developing, for example the

violence perpetrated against girls though new information and communication technologies, i.e. mobile phones and internet. Such violence is perpetrated against girls in school settings.

Policies of zero tolerance for violence against girls; sensitization of students, teachers and parents; provision of appropriate and safe sanitation and recreational facilities; and securing of safe routes to and from school – through, for example, development of alarm systems and provision of transport - are among critical strategies to ensure the elimination of harassment and violence against girls in school settings and an empowering school environment for girls.

A 2002 report by the European Union identified characteristics of good educational practice to combat violence, based on insights gained through experience of EU Member States in implementing the strategies set out in the *Platform for Action*. These include, among others:

- Teaching young people to practice equality through fostering cooperation between girls and boys, based on mutual respect.
- Encouraging the required cognitive, emotional and behavioural change, including through:
  o challenging the erroneous linking of biological differences between women and men with social or psychological differences that are a result of culture and upbringing;
  o incorporating the study of the history of discrimination and violence against women in the curriculum;
  o deconstructing the stereotypical approach to male identity building, which associates female values with weakness and submission and male values with strength, control, emotional stamina and use of violence.
- Developing appropriate educational procedures -- including through active student participation and use of the media -- to implement these objectives.
- Providing appropriate teacher training and incentives, and enabling teachers to cooperate with other actors working on violence against women outside the school environment.

Much more needs to be done to ensure that the relationship between violence and the empowerment of girls in schools is better recognized and addressed. Girls need access to education, possibilities to complete their education and opportunities to achieve at the highest level. They must, also, however, be able to do this in a secure environment which ensures their empowerment. Education International - and all regional and national member organizations - could use the momentum created by the UN Secretary-General's global campaign on violence against women, to ensure that this issue is high on the global agenda. A campaign on violence in schools – under the broader mantle of the Secertary-General's campaign- would make a significant contribution.

Critical methodological issues for ensuring sustained attention to girls' empowerment

Efforts to address stereotypes, create positive/inspiring envirometns, eliminate violence and foster the empowerment of girls in schools must be an integral part of educational policies and programmes. Efforts in new areas are often introduced through project methodology, i.e. specific projects with separate budgets (and sometimes separate personnel) are set up to address these issues. Projects are an excellent means for developing clarity on issues, contributing to formulation of relevant goals, and developing effective

strategies. But only if the outcomes of specific projects are applied at a broader level. Unfortunately, in many cases, work in these areas does not develop beyond the project stage. Once projects are 'completed', according to the established time-frame and budget, funding is stopped and all activities cease. While there may be positive outcomes for the teachers/students involved in the project, longer-term impacts on the educational system as a whole are not necessarily seen.

The objective of activities in theses areas must be to develop goals, strategies and expertise in order to transform educational policy and practice. This requires a long-term perspective and full integration of these aspects into school policy, curricula, teaching methods and materials and teacher training and school management procedures, through the gender mainstreaming strategy. This is the only way to ensure the sustainable, long-term change required.

Conclusions

We are well aware today that there can be no significant or sustainable transformation in societies until women and girls as well as men and boys receive basic quality education which is empowering and enables them to take their rightful place as equal partners and leaders in development.

We are also aware that 'full equality' in education – i.e. education that is empowering,- requires looking beyond access and retention issues, and even beyond achievement goals, to ensuring that the education provided to women and girls opens up all opportunities to develop positive self -identities, to achieve their full potential and to participate fully in all areas of societal life, alongside men and boys.

The strategies needed to ensure 'full equality' and empowerment in and through education are also well-known. With the target-date for the achievement of the goal of 'full equality' in education by 2015 fast approaching, it is important to reassess progress in the implementation of these strategies – to identify the gains and the gaps – and to find creative ways to accelerate our efforts to build on the gains made and to address the remaining gaps. We must urgently strengthen our attention to achievement of the goals set for 2015 to ensure that we are 'on the move for equality' in the area of education.

It is also essential that we fully recognize and build on the potential of the education system to raise awareness of and actively promote gender equality, equal rights and empowerment of women and girls. Not only must we, for example, eliminate violence against girls in education but also work strategically to use the education system to contribute to the elimination of violence against women and girls in the wider society. Equally important is enhanced efforts to fully engage men and boys – students, teachers, parents and community leaders - in the important work of promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women through education.

Thank you.