



UNGEI Strategic Directions 2018-2023

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) is a partnership of organizations committed to gender equality in education and the empowerment of girls and young women. Established in 2000, UNGEI is a global authority on gender and education and provides a platform for partners to speak with one voice to accelerate progress.

UNGEI brings together international organizations, development agencies, academic and civil society organizations, and private sector representatives engaged with gender equality and the education of women and girls. Over the last 15 years, UNGEI has used the power of partnership to champion the rights of girls and women who are not granted access to global discussions and decisions; and to hold partners and the broader community accountable for global commitments to girls' education as laid out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) agenda, and to gender equality in education as agreed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Experience has led UNGEI to understand that an exclusive emphasis on girls' education is an incomplete strategy to promote gender equality, yet where needed, education programs should target girls due to their marginalized status. At the same time, these efforts should be carried out with a focus on changing gendered relations and norms, so that the underlying causes of girls' disadvantage can be addressed. An emphasis on gender, rather than girls, will permit a broader discussion around how gender inequality limits the potential of both girls and boys to fully develop their capabilities¹.

This document describes UNGEI's vision, goals, and objectives for 2018-2023. It also details mechanisms for measuring progress as UNGEI helps set the international agenda through advocacy, policy dialogue, promoting evidence-based solutions, and sharing good practice for advancing girls' education and gender equality.

UNGEI's decisions and actions are guided by four **core values** that define how its partners work together, with the aim of keeping the young women and girls who are most affected at the center of its work:

1. Equality and non-discrimination: All partners commit to practicing and promoting gender equality and the empowerment of girls and young women.

¹*Empowering adolescent girls in developing countries: The potential role of education*, (Murphy Graham and Lloyd, 2015).

2. Mutual accountability and participation: Partners agree to be held accountable for the commitments they make to one another, to acknowledge and address uneven power relations among donors, partner countries, civil society organizations, and marginalized women and girls to ensure that all have an equal voice.

3. Collaboration among partners: UNGEI partners agree to develop and promote a shared agenda, to fully realize the ‘collaborative advantage’ of partnership, and to share information about planning and implementation transparently.

4. Local decision-making and action: UNGEI partners are committed to the principle that decision-making should include those most affected by the decision, and that actions are most effective when there is local ownership and accountability. This is an extension of UNGEI’s determination that education should help break down the structures that interfere with the rights of women and girls to make decisions about things that affect their own lives and matter to them the most.

VISION AND GOALS

The Sustainable Development Goal for Education lays out a courageous and expansive agenda: *equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all*, including the elimination of gender disparities from early childhood through tertiary education. SDG 4 also recognizes the role of education in advancing the SDG 5 on gender equality, and commits to ensuring that education empowers girls and women, boys and men to reach their full potential. Further, the Education 2030 Framework for Action calls on governments and partners to eliminate gender bias and discrimination and put in place gender-sensitive policies, planning, and learning environments.

Learning from the previous 15 years, the SDGs aim to ‘leave no one behind’ and address inequalities between and within countries, regions, and across the globe. Since UNGEI’s inception, global commitments to girls’ education and gender equality have formed the basis for its work. With UNGEI’s focus on addressing on-going, structural, and diverse inequalities, the SDGs, in particular SDG 4 and 5, provide a relevant framework and an agreed-upon, forward-looking agenda.

Drawing from the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, UNGEI’s **vision** is *a world with equitable and universal access to quality education at all levels², and a world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social, and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed³.*

² All levels includes ECE to tertiary education, formal and non-formal education, technical and vocational training and other forms of lifelong learning.

³ *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, (United Nations, 2015),

The Unfinished Agenda: gender equality in education

Since 2000, significant progress has been made to advance gender equality in education. More girls and young women are accessing education at all levels and globally there is little difference between the overall rates of out-of-school girls and boys. However, global averages mask considerable differences at regional and country levels:

- The gender gap is particularly striking for girls and boys who will never enter school. Fifteen million primary school-aged girls will never enter primary school, compared to about 10 million boys⁴.
- Overall trends towards gender parity are positive. However, gender disparity at the primary level persists in 37 percent of countries, with disparity at the expense of girls in more than 80 percent of these.⁵ While gender disparity increases at lower and upper secondary level, the patterns are more complex and in some contexts the gaps are at boys' expense, as more boys drop out before completing secondary school.
- Globally, the poorest girls are most likely to be out of school. Other factors also intersect with gender, so that poor, rural girls, girls with disabilities, and girls from ethnic minorities are least likely to be in school and learning. In Nigeria, Pakistan, and Yemen, only around 25 percent of rural girls complete lower secondary education, but nearly 50 percent of rural boys do.⁶
- Conflict has a devastating effect on the availability, access, and quality of education for all children. Girls are uniquely and disproportionately affected by conflict and face multiple threats to accessing safe and quality education. As a result, girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys in conflict-affected contexts. Adolescent girls are 90 percent more likely to be out of secondary school than girls in more stable environments.⁷

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.

⁴ *Leaving no one behind: How far on the way to universal primary and secondary education?* (UNESCO Policy Paper 27, Fact Sheet 37, July 2016), 5.

⁵ *Global Education Monitoring Report 2016: Gender Review: Creating Sustainable Futures for All*, (Paris: UNESCO, 2016) 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015: Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges*, (Paris: UNESCO, 2015).

To achieve this vision, UNGEI embraces **two goals**, which will contribute to the fulfillment of its vision. These are:

- **Gender equality in and through education:** This includes equality of access to all levels of education and through alternative learning pathways; equality of experience in schools and non-formal learning spaces; and equality of education opportunities for girls and boys to learn and achieve equal outcomes, both in education and in their lives. Although more girls and women are succeeding in education than ever before, in many countries, regions, and communities, girls are still not gaining access especially at higher levels of education or not learning. In others, only girls from the richest families or urban areas are on track to succeed. In this sense, gender equality means all girls accessing early learning opportunities and primary school, and transitioning to secondary education or alternative learning pathways, with a vision of completing secondary school and progressing to higher education. It also means supporting girls to learn and achieve; to gain confidence in their ability as learners and agents of their own lives, and become young women able to apply their knowledge, skills, and abilities to fulfill their potential.

- **The empowerment of girls and women:** We recognize that to achieve gender equality and ensure that young women and girls learn, participate, and lead in society, it is essential to challenge existing unequal structures and power relations and transform harmful and restrictive gender norms and stereotypes for people of all genders. This means addressing curriculum and institutional biases and harmful gender norms in classrooms and school, as well as homes and communities that limit the potential of girls and women. Empowerment through education also recognizes the agency of girls and women to transform their lives and society.

INFLUENCING FACTORS

A number of factors are critical to UNGEI's ability to advance its goals. These include the importance of engaging men and boys, the role of financing for education, the participation of youth, and the specific context of education in conflict, crisis, and emergencies.

UNGEI recognizes that the full involvement, engagement, and commitment of men and boys is critical to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Gender equality in education means that schools and education systems demonstrate and promote positive gender relations and norms. For this to happen, men and boys (including fathers, community and religious leaders, teachers, students, policymakers and education administrators, teacher union leaders, and other education stakeholders) must understand and challenge male privilege, gender biases, and gender-based violence. Men and boys must also be engaged so that they can better understand that just as traditional models of masculinity undermine the rights of women and girls as well as gender non-conforming students to quality education and safe and supportive learning environments, such models

of masculinity also limit men's own options and opportunities. Strengthening opportunities for men and boys to participate in and support gender equality efforts has a positive impact not only on women and girls but also on the lives of men and boys.

Because sufficient financing is critical to achieving these goals, UNGEI will advocate for increased domestic and global resources for education broadly and financing for gender equality in education and the education of young women and girls specifically.

The particular challenges of schooling in the context of conflict and crisis will be addressed in a cross-cutting fashion across all four objectives. This emphasis responds directly to evidence demonstrating that girls' education outcomes are weakest in crisis and conflict-affected settings, and is grounded in SDG 4 targets. The elimination of gender disparities in education cannot be achieved without addressing the disproportionate number of out-of-school girls in conflict and crisis situations.

UNGEI embraces the importance of engaging young people as equal partners in this work. Without a doubt, youth are both a major human resource for development and key agents for social change, economic development, and technological innovation. In 2015, UNGEI committed to increasing the active and meaningful participation of youth, and will continue to explore opportunities to do so in all areas.

THEORY OF CHANGE

To advance gender equality in and through education, UNGEI has learned that two transformations must occur: (1) education systems must provide opportunities for girls and boys to learn: to achieve equal outcomes in safe and supportive environments free of gender stereotypes and bias; and (2) institutions within society must offer equitable opportunities to women and men to achieve their full potential, with the agency to make decisions about their health, their careers, and their personal lives. Thus, the UNGEI partnership must target its efforts toward those changes within education systems, and society more broadly, that will support these transformations. The expectation is that by using approaches and methods best suited to its mandate and comparative advantage and working with strategic partners, UNGEI's efforts will complement those of other actors — in particular leaders in health, women's rights, child protection, water and sanitation, governance, and poverty eradication — to bring about results.

As a multi-stakeholder partnership of gender and education actors, UNGEI works in four ways to advance its goals:

- Through leveraging the power of partnership to engage in policy dialogue at global, regional, and country levels to ensure that policies and costed plans advance girls' education and gender equality;

Theory of Change Statement

If education policies and plans promote girls' education and gender equality at all levels and are effectively implemented, including in crisis- and conflict-affected contexts; if evidence of good practices in gender-responsive education and effective teaching and learning approaches, including those designed to address the needs of marginalized girls and harmful gender norms, are known and employed; if capacity to understand and address gender issues in education is strengthened among men and women across the education system; then gender equality in education can be achieved and all girls and boys can learn.

- Through identifying and sharing good practices for educating and empowering girls; working with partners to develop evidence, tools, and analytical reports to support policy dialogue and effective programming; and, where needed, collaborating with others to build capacity for integrating gender considerations into education processes;
- Through advocacy to champion the rights of all girls and young women to quality education, with a particular focus on the marginalized;
- Through mobilizing multi-stakeholder partnerships to share knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources to advance gender equality in education and for mutual support and accountability.

OBJECTIVES 2018-2023

The following objectives support UNGEI's aims of gender equality in and through education and the empowerment of women and girls through education. These objectives do not represent the sum of UNGEI activities, but reflect priority approaches to accelerate progress that will only come through the mutual effort of all partners. UNGEI's role is to be impatient, to make things happen more quickly, and to look out for those left out.

UNGEI will give priority to global and regional initiatives that address these objectives. Over the five-year period 2018-2023, it will use its collaborative advantage for gender equality in education to focus on advocacy and policy dialogue, evidence-building, knowledge-brokering, building collective accountability, and partnerships. It will address both education-specific challenges and broader structural and institutional imbalances that contribute to gender inequity. UNGEI will focus its efforts by shifting away from some of what it has done in the past, while strengthening its capacity to undertake new initiatives.

OBJECTIVE 1

Promote and support gender-responsive education plans and policies to ensure education systems are effective, supportive, and inclusive learning spaces for girls and boys.

UNGEI will:

- Support national governments and civil society to increase capacity for gender-responsive planning and policy implementation;
- Strengthen engagement with leading actors in the area of health, including water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), menstrual health management (MHM) and sexual and reproductive health, to ensure that schools are responsive to the needs of all students, in particular adolescent girls; and
- Support the work of partners in crisis and conflict-affected contexts; engage with new partners to provide technical advice and practical tools to ensure education plans and policies are informed by sound gender and conflict analysis.

OBJECTIVE 2

Promote gender-responsive teaching and learning in schools, as well as non-formal learning spaces.

UNGEI will:

- Support the development and use of gender-responsive pedagogy and classroom practices and the elimination of gender bias in textbooks, curricula, and teaching and learning material;
- Support research and advocacy efforts aimed at better understanding and addressing the needs of marginalized girls, including girls with disabilities; and
- Promote the use of gender-responsive teaching and learning approaches to address challenges specific to conditions of conflict and crisis.

OBJECTIVE 3

Strengthen capacity for gender-transformative governance and leadership in education.

UNGEI will:

- Contribute to global and regional efforts led by teacher unions and other lead actors, to promote women in education leadership and strengthen the capacity of teachers and managers to model positive, gender-equal relations in classrooms, schools, unions, and education ministries; and
- Support the capacity of education ministries to champion gender equality.

OBJECTIVE 4

Advance the elimination of School Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV).

UNGEI will:

- Expand the depth and reach of UNGEI's on-going advocacy efforts regarding SRGBV by promoting new research, policy analysis, and production of tools and materials;
- Engage with other partners in identifying and promoting good practice approaches to eliminate SRGBV, including producing and promoting minimum standards and monitoring tools for safe and supportive schools and other context-specific approaches to address SRGBV in conflict and crisis situations; and
- Strengthen existing partnerships with education unions and civil society networks leading frontline efforts to make schools safe for learning and locations of decent work.

Additionally, to advance UNGEI's overarching goal of gender equality in education as well as UNGEI's four objectives for 2018-2023, UNGEI will:

- Convene global and regional actors, including UNGEI partners and others, to build mutual accountability for the commitments to gender equality in education outlined in the Education 2030 agenda; and
- Strengthen efforts to build global and national capacity to collect evidence on progress towards the achievement of global commitments to gender equality in education, and identify areas needing further analysis, advocacy or action.