Formative Evaluation of
The United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative

Executive Summary
United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI)

April 2012


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Executive Summary

This report documents the findings and recommendations of the formative evaluation of the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI). The evaluation took place in 2011, ten years after the establishment of UNGEI and sought to:

- Establish a baseline for UNGEI, and
- Document achievements and challenges in the three UNGEI outcome areas:
  - Policy and advocacy for girls’ education and gender equality
  - Good practice identification and dissemination
  - Partnership establishment

The evaluation examined the interactions between the global, country and regional levels of the partnership. In addition, it validated through the evaluation process, the proposed UNGEI Monitoring and Evaluation Framework which will form the basis for future assessment of progress.

The evaluation took place over a period of nine months and covered four case studies - Egypt, Nepal, Nigeria, and Uganda – and an evaluation of the East Asia and the Pacific (EAP) regional partnership. In addition, a mapping was conducted for 57 countries which were on record as either having an active partnership or some UNGEI-led activities, as well as conducting interviews with global stakeholders, and undertaking a review of documentation. Quality assurance was provided by UNICEF Monitoring and Evaluation Officers, while national, regional and global reference groups commented on the methodology, draft and final reports.

Challenges to the evaluation included retroactively establishing baselines for each partnership in contexts where records and documentation were not systematically kept. The high staff turn-over in agencies complicated the task further, as did the poor security in some countries. Notwithstanding these limitations, the evaluation was able to collect and triangulate sufficient data for the key areas of inquiry, allowing it to respond to the main evaluation questions.

Overall conclusions

Evaluation findings underscore that UNGEI has played a prominent policy advocacy role for girls’ education and gender equality in selected fora. This role has been particularly prominent globally, in the EARP region, as well as in selected countries – such as Nigeria and Uganda.

As a result of its policy advocacy role, UNGEI has established itself as a recognized partnership in the global dialogue around girl’s education and gender equality. UNGEI’s participation and technical inputs at global education fora and initiatives – such as the Education for All Global Monitoring Report – have contributed to a stronger focus on girls’ education and gender equality in policy dialogue, in
documentation, and in policy discussions. The regional level where UNGEI is resourced with Regional Focal Points (RFPs) had two different approaches. The East Asia and Pacific Region (EAPR) has established a formal partnership which has made substantive contribution to policy and advocacy. However, the EAPR partnership approach was found to be limited by the absence of outreach into the countries in the region, and by the fact that there is little evidence that it uses the member organizations as a channel for reaching into countries for advocacy purposes. In the other regions (Eastern and Southern Africa Region, Middle East and North Africa, West and Central Africa Region) the focus has instead been on supporting national partnerships in their efforts towards advancing girls’ education and gender equality. UNGEI members and stakeholders are of the opinion that UNGEI should continue to play a key role in policy advocacy efforts in the immediate and medium term.

The evaluation finds that **at global, national and regional levels UNGEI has played a role in collecting, synthesizing, and disseminating good practice.** In the case study countries, the evaluation found evidence of good practices being implemented and shared, of capacity being built around good practice identification and reporting, and of good practices being used to inform policy development. At the regional level the EAP region has been particularly active in producing toolkits and studies through collective efforts by the UNGEI members, and these products are considered relevant and of high quality. However it is not clear to what extent these have informed policy and practice (at regional and national levels). At global level, UNGEI’s work on good practice is considered valuable although some stakeholders highlighted that they would like to see UNGEI establish itself as a leading reference on good practice in girls’ education and gender equality – something which is not presently a goal of UNGEI. For the future, many stakeholders would like to see UNGEI play a more prominent overall knowledge management role in the education and gender equality agenda. In this role UNGEI would function as a knowledge hub of best practice, delivered for and by partner agencies.

UNGEI has also constituted a **valuable mechanism for coordination and priority setting** among its members. **UNGEI has successfully established a global partnership that is valued by its members.** UNGEI’s governance structures have been strengthened over the past years and have allowed the partnership to take decisions and move forward in its main areas of activity. However, responsibility for operational decision making at the global level – in particular between the Global Advisory Committee (GAC) and the UNGEI Secretariat - needs clarifying and strengthening so as to ensure efficient and effective follow-up of activities. Additionally, the technical capacity of UNGEI at the global level still falls short of what the partnership needs to advance its goals (at all levels). There is also a need for the GAC to strengthen its understanding of the national level, for the membership and functioning of UNGEI to be examined in light of the changing landscape in girls’ education and gender equality, and to find ways to strengthen the institutional commitment to UNGEI (as opposed to the individual commitment).

At national level, the evaluation found that UNGEI has active partnerships in 33 of 57 countries previously reported as having partnerships. These **UNGEI country partnerships have goals which mirror those of the global partnership, underscoring the relevance of UNGEI’s agenda.** Almost all 33 country partnerships operate at the national level and a substantial number have UNGEI partnerships operating at sub-national levels. Countries engage in a wide range of activities. Advocacy/sensitization, training
and capacity building, and materials production and dissemination figure prominently among the activities. There is less of a focus on promoting coordination, on research and on monitoring. The in-school population at primary level is the largest beneficiary of UNGEI at country level, followed by in school secondary. More than half of the countries also include activities for out of school primary children. In terms of formalization of the partnership, a total of 14 countries meet the three criteria that UNGEI has established for the existence of a partnership. Financial resources are by far the most frequently cited challenge for partnerships. In ten countries partnerships that were established have since ceased to exist. Reasons for the demise of the partnership vary from country to country.

In countries where strong partnerships exist, UNGEI was found to have positioned itself as a valuable and strong player in policy dialogue and advocacy, and has also played a major role in promoting and sharing of good practice. The evaluation did not do an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the partnerships across all the countries, but the case studies seem to indicate that critical factors for success of country partnerships relate to government commitment, leadership of the partnership, partnership composition, technical capacity, outreach to local levels and structures, and mechanisms for decision making and operation. However the evaluation also found that some of these areas—in particular those related to the strengthening of the partnership models, in-country training and support, and exchanges between partnerships for sharing of experience, have received relatively little support. In terms of capacity, a number of countries underscored capacity challenges of the UNGEI group itself and the need for improving areas such as technical knowledge on gender issues as well as communication skills. The country analysis also highlighted a need identified by country stakeholders for a sound analysis of the factors explaining the persistence of the disparities between girls and boys. This was considered particularly critical as a basis for decisions around future operations and policies, as well as essential to building the capacity of the partnerships. The evaluation also noted that a substantial number of countries have no or very poor systems for monitoring and evaluation of UNGEI’s operations and activities. For the future, country partnerships could benefit from stronger support in strengthening partnerships management, as well as technical inputs into locally relevant areas of capacity building, exchange of experience between partnerships, monitoring and evaluation, and research. The feedback to the evaluation highlighted that UNGEI should strengthen its strategic planning and its technical capacity to meet these needs. In this context, the UNGEI Monitoring and Evaluation Framework is considered a valid and important tool by countries and regions for improving the monitoring and priority setting of the partnership.

Overall and for the future, the evaluation highlights that the goals for which UNGEI was established continue to be valid and important even in a changed development aid and education context.

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1 The UNGEI standard for determining if a partnership can be formally identified as part of UNGEI requires that the partnership in question meet the following criteria: a) have terms of reference which formalize the mandate, members and governance of the national or sub-national partnership; b) have an annual work plan that is monitored by the national partnership; and c) report against the annual work plan to the UNGEI RFP.
stronger and more pronounced engagement of partners in the girls’ education and gender equality agenda has been achieved in the past ten years and provides an opportunity for continuing to harness collective efforts. Progress in gender parity in education in many countries has been a key achievement over the past decade – and one to which UNGEI contributed. However, considerable - and more complex - challenges and gaps in girls’ education and gender equality remain and will require more difficult to achieve changes. This implies an adjusted policy advocacy role for UNGEI - with a more targeted agenda that builds on UNGEI’s strengths.

The evaluation finds that UNGEI has clear areas of strengths and added value. A major area of strength has been its interaction and input into a select number of influential global initiatives where it has sought to present evidence and highlight key issues. The diversity of its membership – which includes the different levels at which UNGEI operates (global, regional and country level) is a further strength. This has opened up the discussion between partners, improved understanding of issues, resulted in collaborative efforts, and in a stronger focus on strengthening the evidence base around girls’ education and gender equality. However, UNGEI has been less successful in consistently monitoring the progress on girls’ education at regional and country levels. These strengths provide a solid basis for further sharpening its strategies and for continuing to influence the girls’ education and gender equality agenda in the coming years.

UNGEI’s organizational structure has been an important operational basis for its work. UNGEI’s strong link with UNICEF has allowed it to tap into UNICEFs technical and other resources, but has at times made it difficult to identify a distinct UNGEI contribution. The UNGEI Secretariat has provided key follow-up between UNGEI meetings, and has sustained the link with the regional and country levels. However, UNGEI’s technical capacity has at times been insufficient and the use of working groups has not always provided an efficient solution. Regional Focal Points (RFPs) based at UNICEF regional offices are a key link between the different levels of UNGEI, although the amount time devoted to the regional activities by respective RFPs varies considerably. RFPs provided important support in the mobilization phase to establish country level partnerships, as well as technical and financial inputs into country level processes. There is room for further engagement and improvement of mechanisms and models for partnership functioning and in capacity building. RFPs are thus a useful resource which could be further tapped for ensuring that the country partnership mechanisms are further strengthened, and that UNGEI’s global decision making is better informed by country needs.

Recommendations

The evaluation findings result in the following main areas of recommendation:

1. **UNGEI should make policy advocacy the main priority for its future endeavors at global level and equip itself to be a strong advocate for the priorities that it identifies.** In this role, UNGEI should be guided/supported by:
   a. An evidence-based focused agenda of policy advocacy priorities in girls’ education and gender equality for the coming 5-10 years, clearly identifying advocacy goals, targets
and strategies, as well as the means for measuring progress and outcomes, at the levels at which UNGEI operates.

b. The establishment of an advisory/guidance panel on policy advocacy as part of UNGEI’s organizational structure. The panel should bring together key experts in this area to provide technical inputs into the main decision making structures of UNGEI on priorities and assist in monitoring progress.

c. The recruitment of an additional full time staff member for the Secretariat to support its technical input into the policy advocacy agenda.

2. **UNGEI should develop a plan of priority activities and publications that is aligned with UNGEI’s proposed medium term agenda in policy advocacy.** This plan should include:

a. Mechanisms for strong and consistent engagement with the international academic community to strengthen relevant good practice identification, documentation and dissemination

b. Clear dissemination strategies and targets for publications, as well as a strategy of tracking impact of a sample of its publications to learn lessons and inform strategizing on future endeavors.

c. The development and dissemination of a practical guideline for country partnerships and actors to identifying, synthesizing and disseminating good practice

3. **Strengthen the global UNGEI partnership by:**

a. Reviewing the membership of the GAC with a view to adding members that play a key role in the overall context and phasing out members in line with UNGEI’s revised focus and priorities.

b. Recruiting of a small number of country level members to enhance the understanding and responsiveness of the GAC to country level issues.

c. Putting in place clear directives for the involvement of institutions in the GAC (as opposed to individuals); member institutions should take it upon themselves to revise the terms of reference to reflect responsibilities of participating staff members as institutional representatives on the UNGEI GAC.

4. **Enhance the capacity and the relevance of the work that is done by UNGEI at regional level by:**

a. Negotiating with UNICEF that UNGEI RFPs devote a major portion of their time to UNGEI

b. Prioritizing a focus on the national level, and in particular on strengthening country partnerships, across all the regions, rather than the establishment of regional partnerships

c. Working with RFPs to develop multi-year regional strategies and plans outlining priorities for UNGEI’s support from the country and regional level based on an assessment of progress and gaps

d. Putting in place mechanisms for knowledge sharing and dissemination between RFPs and national members.
e. **Continuing to make policy advocacy the main focus of UNGEI in the EAP region** while using partner structures to develop outreach strategies which will influence policy dialogue and decision making at country level. The formalization of an UNGEI partnership with one or several countries in the region is recommended in this context as a way to both inform and be informed by country needs.

5. **Strengthening national level partnerships by:**
   a. Developing and implementing a prioritized capacity building plan for national level partnerships. The plan should identify priority countries, identify the main areas of weakness, and where and how UNGEI might prioritize strengthening of these partnerships.
   b. Identifying strategies for advocating and securing stronger involvement of national leadership in UNGEI.
   c. Providing technical and financial support to priority countries in conducting situation analysis of the factors explaining the persistence of the disparities among girls and boys.
   d. Conducting a further analysis of the funding situation and options for funding country level partnerships, and identifying priority actions for ensuring that partnerships have a small budget that allows them to function and provide seed money for selected activities – this could possibly be done by devolving some of the UNICEF budget within UNICEF’s thematic funding to the country level.
   e. Prioritizing continued work on strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of UNGEI’s operations which has been carried out by the Monitoring and Evaluation working group.
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