



## Summary Report UNGEI Technical Meeting

Sunday, 12 November 2006  
Mena House Oberoi Hotel, Cairo, Egypt

### Session I: Welcome and Introduction of Theme

The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) technical meeting was held on 12 November 2006 in Cairo, Egypt. The theme of the meeting was "Gender and Early Childhood Care and Education" (ECCE), as a response to the Global Monitoring Report (GMR) 2007, which was on ECCE. In addition to the UNGEI Global Advisory Committee members, participants included Ministers of Education from Burundi, Egypt, Ghana, the Gambia and Tajikistan; representatives of education ministries from Guinea Conakry, Jordan, Kenya, Sierra Leone and Yemen; civil society organizations and the donor community.

The meeting opened with welcome remarks by Hon. Yousry El Gamal, Minister of Education from Egypt, who welcomed participants and highlighted Egypt's achievements in education and ECCE. This was followed by a statement by Ms. Rima Salah, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, who stressed the role of UNGEI and this meeting to acknowledge the importance of the critical links between Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Gender, as well as Egypt's commitment to girls' education at the highest level. She highlighted some of the benefits of ECD, especially for girls' education, which included early positive gender socialization; closing the disparity gaps; focus on especially the poor girls; giving the girl child a fair start in life; and supporting the achievement of the MDGs. The need to focus on families and community-based ECD programmes was emphasized.

Ambassador Musheera Khattab, Secretary-General of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) in Egypt delivered the keynote address in which she acknowledged the importance of ECD in enforcing child rights and delivering on our commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and Egypt's commitment to 60 percent ECD enrolment by 2010. Some of the needs raised by Ambassador Khattab include: a policy to ensure coordination of different sectors, monitoring and evaluation as well as accountability for coordination bodies, and doubling of efforts, including through increased funding, to achieve the goal by 2010.

The opening was followed by a presentation from Mr. Nicholas Burnett, Director of the EFA Global Monitoring Report Team, who highlighted of the links between Gender and ECCE in the 2007 Global Monitoring Report. This was followed by an analysis presentation by Ms. Cassie Landers, ECD Expert from Columbia University, who first addressed the critical links that exist between Gender, ECCE and School Readiness, followed by comments on whether the GMR 2007 had captured this critical links in the report. It was mentioned that despite the report covering the parity issue in girls' education, in both pre-school and primary schools, the report

did not elaborate on these links that are so interdependent. It was also stated that ECCE should be viewed on a more holistic manner than just through education.

## **Session II: Policies and Strategies to expand ECCE**

The second session of the meeting was facilitated by Cream Wright, UNICEF Global Chief of Education. This session was conducted in a “town-hall” format where statements from panelists were followed by questions or comments from the plenary. The topic for statements and discussion was on identifying strategies and resources to better position gender focused early childhood care and education in national plans and priorities. The panelists for this session included Hon. Mrs. Angelina Baiden-Amisshah, Deputy Minister of Basic and Teacher Education of Ghana, Dr. Tayseer Al-Nahar, Secretary General of the Ministry of Education of Jordan, Mr. Anton Jense, Representative of the EFA-FTI Secretariat, and Mr. Nicholas Burnett, Director of the Global Monitoring Report Team.

The session was initiated with a few thoughts for discussion from Dr. Cream Wright, which included issues on low priority for ECD despite existing extensive research; constraints faced by countries that want to move the ECD agenda forward in their countries; existing and potential incentives for countries that invest in ECD; and country experiences in investing in ECD and its impact on children’s well-being.

Following the introduction, the meeting proceeded with presentations from the panelists with opportunities for questions and answers between panel presentations. The session was very lively with a wide variety of participation of ministers, NGOs, donors, specialists, etc. The format of the meeting allowed for opportunities for participants to bring forth their concerns with regards to constraints in resource availability, planning and prioritizing, placement of plans in the national plans, etc. for ECD.

Following are the major points/issues/questions/answers that were brought up either by the panel or the participants:

The minister from **Gambia** made a strong statement that it was not a question of countries’ willingness to invest in ECD since its importance is already acknowledged. The issue was more of financing and investing. With current resource limitations, it was difficult to invest in ECD. How can countries that wanted to prioritize ECD be able to allocate more funds to it with competing needs in the other areas of education?

The representative from the **Fast Track Initiative (FTI)** pointed out the issue of targeting the last 10 percent of the children who always seem to be left out while implementing programmes. It was also acknowledged that ECD is most effective for the most disadvantaged who do not seem to be well targeted by programmes. It was also noted that the FTI should not have a narrow target of only primary education but should expand to cover both post-primary as well as pre-primary.

The minister from **Kenya** also emphasized the need to target the most marginalized segment of society i.e. the poor, the slum dwellers, etc. He also noted that these were the populations that

were also the most difficult to reach. There is a need to change the attitude towards ECD since it was not considered to be a part of education. ECD is not only a part of education but also of other sectors that have direct influence on the well being of the child i.e. health, nutrition, water & sanitation, etc.

Comments from the **plenary** brought up the issue of insufficient linking of ECD research with financing. More work is required to get the research information on impacts of ECD to the financial and policy makers of the country. The link between women's literacy and ECD was also emphasized through data showing that chances of children of literate mothers are more likely to receive ECD services as opposed to children of illiterate mothers. Hence the need to focus on literacy programmes to address ECD.

**Canada** stated that their support was focused on primary education but that they were moving towards a more comprehensive approach to include pre-primary to secondary. They would be taking a hard look at ECD before decisions to support would be reached. Similarly, **Denmark** mentioned that there was no clear strategy to include ECD as part of the support to education, but made reference to the Dakkar statement that "the international community will act on a global initiative", and how we must ensure that ECD is part of that initiative. **Sweden** stated that they did support the integrated inter-sectoral approach to ECD and that their support was already channeled through UNICEF through its new Medium Term Strategic Plan for 2006 – 2009. They wanted to see a holistic approach to education which included pre-primary to secondary, and to partner with the civil society in advocacy and partnership with governments and in acting as a watch-dog for the ECD movement. **Norway** wanted to see ECD as a strategy to also reach the most disadvantaged and excluded populations of children, as these last 10 percent of the population that is never reached but also stands as one that stands to gain the most from ECD interventions.

The Minister from **Jordan** emphasized that there is a need to move towards quality of education along with addressing parity. The issue of an integrated approach in the reality of fragmentation of sectors is a difficult one and needs to be addressed in order to provide real comprehensive services for children. He stressed the need for new approaches that would move away from time-bound project to a movement if we are to reach the goals.

**NGOs** from Ghana and Zimbabwe stressed the issue of roles of NGOs and how they can contribute towards national initiatives and the need for governments to bring the NGOs into mainstream national schemes and not be limited to small projects. They also highlighted the concern of sufficient data availability and how much is required before governments prioritize and invest in ECD. The question of how long should women and children remain second class citizens before countries start investing in them was also raised.

**Egypt** emphasized the need for parental education and how this should become the vehicle to address the issues of relationship between the men and women at home; their behavior regarding children; as well as children's nutrition, health, disability, etc. There is a need to build the capacity of the front-line workers on how to support families for a more integrated service to children.

The representative from the **GMR Team** stated three factors as very important to address: parental education as a vehicle to address the earliest years and the integrated nature of children's needs; economic argument for ECD, which has been documented and is straight forward, but there is dire need to find the funds to prioritize for and invest in ECD; and continued advocacy for investment in ECD and the efficiency of use of that investment.

During the plenary an issue was brought up regarding what to prioritize first: secondary and tertiary education or ECD? With limitation of resources in many countries, how was a country to decide where to invest its limited resources? Many of the countries are facing this dilemma, and hence there is a need to advocate more for ECD as well as for more funds to be allocated exclusively for ECD. This can become a strategy not only to address the needs of children during these formative years, but also as an investment to better prepare children for schools, leading to better performance and completion. There is a need to develop strategies for sustainable support that moves towards more robust education systems that includes preparation of children for school, and that there is a need to explore new approaches to address the issue of provision of early interventions in resource constrained environments i.e. child-to-child.

## **Session II: Way Forward**

This session was a group work session where the participants were divided into four groups which looked into four different issues: (a) The early childhood policy agenda: challenges/issues in moving forward (b) Expanding early childhood programmes: partnerships, resource mobilization and advocacy (c) Early childhood programmes and strategies: proven methods and challenges, and (d) Measuring impact and monitoring quality in early childhood programmes: challenges and opportunities. The four groups, after their deliberations, had their resource persons along with Norway, as the co-chair of UNGEI, compiled the outcomes of the group work to be presented to the EFA High Level Group meeting. The outcomes of each of the groups were compiled as major recommendations made by the UNGEI Partnership to the high level group.

Following are the recommendations presented to the EFA High Level Group:

- Develop comprehensive policy frameworks that address the needs of girls and boys from birth to age 8. It is also important to specify the responsibilities and financial commitments across health, nutrition and education sectors. Coordination and management is critical.
- Use UNGEI as the partnership vehicle to promote a range of programme options designed specifically to reach marginalized girls and boys. Empower and enhance communities at the local level. Mobilize resources creatively through national multi-sectoral plans, private sector, NGOs and the donor community.
- Enhance gender sensitive parenting education. Increase school readiness for girls and boys through early learning activities. Make schools ready for girls and boys by enhanced child centred teaching and learning methods for early primary grades.
- Develop national standards for ECCE. Develop gender sensitive monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Children's health, nutrition and education data must be gender disaggregated.