Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011
A Gender Review

WORKING PAPER

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United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
Foreword

The United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI) is the Education for All (EFA) flagship for girls’ education, a partnership of organizations committed to narrowing the gender gap in primary and secondary education. It also seeks to ensure that, by 2015, all children complete primary schooling, with girls and boys having equal access to free, quality education. UNGEI was launched in April 2000 at the World Education Forum in Dakar by then United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan in response to a troubling reality: of the millions of children worldwide who were not in school, more than half were girls – a reality that remains true today.

Since 2008, a significant contribution of UNGEI has been the “Gender Review” of the EFA annual Global Monitoring Report (GMR). This review critically examines the strengths and gaps evident in the monitoring of EFA goals from a gender perspective, and informs advocacy messages on education and gender equality in key thematic areas for governments, development partners and civil society actors.

This year’s GMR report, The hidden crises: Armed conflict and education, is an excellent and timely account of the way in which conflict is destroying opportunities for education globally. More than 40 per cent of out-of-school children live in conflict-affected countries; these same countries have some of the largest gender inequalities and lowest literacy levels in the world. The report asserts that “being female, poor and living in a country affected by conflict are three of the most pervasive risk factors for children being out of school.”

UNGEI is deeply appreciative of the GMR and its accompanying gender overview and offers this gender review to complement the findings of the report. The review is meant to be a stand-alone document and attempts to distil the main messages on gender and education in the report and further sharpen the gender analysis, particularly by making visible the gender dimensions of EFA goals that do not have an explicit gender mandate and drawing linkages across goals and ideas that may otherwise get glossed over in a lengthier report.

As we look towards the 2012 report and beyond, UNGEI is committed to exploring additional ways in which it can proactively support gender analysis and continue its active collaboration in our common quest: education for all.

UNGEI Secretariat, March 2011
Executive Summary

UNGEI’s gender review of the Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (GMR) 2011 is based on a simple premise: Although education is a universal human right, gender inequality across the globe often prevents women and girls from accessing it. Any reporting on the progress of EFA goals must therefore stress the need for gender-responsive educational processes. When supported by well-conceptualized and focused policy, such processes have the power to transform individuals and societies.

Our review is based on the January 2011 early release version of the GMR that was produced before the meeting of the Working Group on EFA. Since that version did not include statistical tables, this review is limited to the information presented in the main report.

The GMR 2011 is divided into two parts: Part I, which deals with progress on the EFA goals and Part II, which focuses on the impact of armed conflict on education. In regard to the monitoring of EFA goals, the report’s emphasis on gender appears to be guided by the way in which the goal in question has been articulated. If the goal clearly includes gender as an important focus, gender figures prominently in the analysis; if that is not the case, the analysis does not consider gender as comprehensively. For instance, the report provides a fine analysis of gender parity issues in primary and secondary education, highlighting the importance of viewing education as a continuum and addressing issues of entry at the right age, as well as survival, completion and quality. The report also covers the gender disparities that characterize the labour markets and links these disparities to issues of secondary education. The issues of gender equality in regard to qualitative and relational issues, however, are not addressed as comprehensively. References exist, but the same depth of analysis is missing.

The GMR analysis in Part II is strong. Gender emerges as a major concern for education in conflict and post-conflict situations. For the first time, a global report has provided an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the impact of armed conflict on education, particularly for girls. The report has also identified the importance of protection in conflict areas. The GMR notes the ability of education to perpetuate violence or peace, depending on its nature and content. Nevertheless, it misses some important gender links, especially from an educational perspective. Notably, it fails to analyse how education can act as a force for maintaining or challenging gender inequality in society.

The GMR makes bold suggestions for leveraging additional resources for education and reforming the aid architecture. The report succeeds in maintaining a focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized throughout. This allows for a disaggregated understanding of many issues from gender and social equity perspectives. What is clear from the report is that gender continues to be an important area of concern for furthering EFA goals: Girls are likely to be disproportionately represented among both out-of-school children and illiterate populations globally, and gender concerns are exacerbated in times of conflict.
The main advocacy messages that emerge from this gender analysis of GMR 2011 are:

- Education is a human right for everyone, including girls and women, at all times and especially during conflict and post-conflict situations. Evidence also suggests that the revival of education could also lead to faster recovery from conflict.

- Protection is a crucial prerequisite for ensuring education, especially for girls. Women’s involvement in monitoring rights violations and ensuring protection would bolster their confidence and increase effectiveness.

- The demand for girls’ education is highly sensitive to household poverty and therefore responds well to well-designed conditional cash or in-kind transfer measures.

- Higher investment in early childhood care and education is crucial for promoting sustained girls’ education.

- The notion of quality should be widened to include transformative, gender-responsive educational process and outcomes. Educational curricula and processes can play a major role in changing many gender-related practices, norms and beliefs, including sexual abuse and violence.

- The reduction of gender disparities in secondary education and in labour markets are mutually reinforcing for strengthening gender equality.

- The cost of not investing in girls’ education far exceeds the cost of investing. Children born to more educated mothers are more likely to survive and less likely to experience malnutrition. The GMR estimates that universal secondary education for girls in sub-Saharan Africa could save as many as 1.8 million lives annually because of its impact on improving nutrition and preventing HIV and AIDS.

- Reform of the aid architecture is under way, but its pace needs to be accelerated, along with a renewed focus on gender and social equity.
Introduction

The United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI) promotes girls’ education and works for gender equality in education through a network of partners at the global, regional, national and sub-national levels. Engagement with Education for All (EFA) processes at various levels is one of UNGEI’s tools for advocacy. The EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) is an important annual publication providing a detailed account on where we stand vis-à-vis different EFA goals. It also serves as a tool for advocacy with national governments and donor agencies. UNGEI undertakes a detailed review of the GMR, with the dual purpose of highlighting the report’s gender-related findings and messages and pointing out the gaps to strengthen the analysis related to girls’ education and gender equality in education.

The GMR has been focusing on a specific goal or theme every year, and this review also takes special note of the gender issues significant for the specific goal or the theme chosen for that respective year. The GMR 2011 focuses on the issue of armed conflict and its impact on education, in addition to providing a report on the each of the six EFA goals. This review also provides special emphasis on the issue of girls’ education and gender equality in education in the context of armed conflicts.

UNGEI believes in a simple premise: Education is a basic human right. This right assumes special importance for girls and women within the current global context of gender inequality. Education has the potential to fulfil individuals’ aspirations, as well as to transform societies for the better by encouraging more equal and meaningful participation of women and other disadvantaged communities around the world. Girls’ education, in particular, helps to reduce gender-based inequalities and violence against girls and women. The instrumental role of education is also well documented. Education, especially girls’ education, plays a crucial role in promoting further education and desirable health practices. Girls’ education also plays a critical role in reducing fertility rates and slowing the spread of HIV and AIDS in developing countries, thereby contributing to social development and economic growth.

Although education has been recognized as a universal human right, and the intrinsic as well as instrumental benefits of girls’ education are well documented, special emphasis and constant reiteration are required to keep the issue of gender equality in education at the forefront of the global agenda. Well conceptualized and targeted policy choices supported by appropriate financial allocations and governance mechanisms are important for reducing the gender disparities that continue to characterize access to education, as well as participation and attainment across the globe. A clear commitment to gender-responsive educational processes, with a focus on the transformative elements of education, is critical, and spurs both empowerment and gender equality. Any report on the progress of EFA goals that is to act as a tool for advocacy must consistently reiterate these messages.

In this context, it is also important to note that gender must not be viewed in isolation, but rather in relation to other forms of inequality and disadvantage that exist in education and impact educational processes and outcomes. These facts, trends and beliefs – coupled with UNGEI’s commitment to act as an effective advocacy network for girls’ education – have informed and guided this review.
The Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011

The GMR 2011 is divided into two parts: Part I reports on the progress of the six EFA goals and discusses issues related to the financing of education while Part II specifically deals with education in conflict areas, including the aspect of aid architecture in detail. GMR 2011 includes a ‘policy focus’ subsection for each unit, which provides evidence-backed policy suggestions. This is helpful for policy advocacy, as it provides deeper analysis of the issue at hand, as well as examples of promising cases.

This review, which also provides a summary of the GMR messages with special reference to gender equality and girls’ education, is classified into three subsections: (i) EFA goals, (ii) Armed conflict and education and (iii) Financing of education and the aid architecture. The concluding section of the review summarizes the main messages that emerge for UNGEI advocacy. This section takes note of what the GMR has noted, and also what it has missed. The review is based on the early release version of the GMR that was made available to a few partner agencies and networks, including UNGEI, in advance. This version did not include statistical tables, and thus comments are limited to the information available in the main report.

There is no definitive answer to the question of whether the GMR has addressed the issue of gender comprehensively. The gender analysis in the report remains quite strong, especially in Part II, where it emerges as a major concern in conflict and post-conflict situations. For the first time, a global report has provided an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the impact of armed conflict on education, especially girls’ education. It is especially commendable that the report does not allow itself to be restricted by the information gaps and consequent limitations of estimates and extrapolations, especially in the case of conflict areas. Instead, the report uses whatever information is available, relying on a diverse range of credible sources, including case studies, small surveys and individual studies. Yet, the absence of analysis of crucial gender implications in some parts of the report, as well as a failure to make connections between certain EFA goals, detracts from the report’s efficacy.

While the report repeatedly refers to both the intrinsic and instrumental aspects of female education, it is tilted towards the latter in providing evidence. In Part I, the emphasis on gender appears to be guided by the way in which the particular EFA goal has been articulated. If the goal clearly includes gender as an important focus, it figures prominently in the analysis; if that is not the case, the analysis does not cover it as comprehensively. The report provides a fine analysis of gender parity issues in primary and secondary education, highlighting the importance of viewing education as a continuum and therefore addressing the issues of entry at right age, as well as survival, completion and quality. It also extends itself to the gender disparities that characterize the labour markets and links these disparities to issues of secondary education.

The issue of male underachievement, now common in many middle-income and high-income countries at the secondary level, has also received insufficient attention in the report. It is important to highlight that the reversal of parity in favour of girls does not imply that gender issues have ceased to exist or that gender equality has been achieved. In reality, such trends usually reveal complex gender patterns that are disadvantageous to both boys and girls. In general, the report tends to focus on issues framing gender parity, while failing to comprehensively address gender equality and the encompassing qualitative and relational issues that exist between the sexes. While references do exist regarding the latter, the same depth of analysis is missing.
The GMR makes bold suggestions for garnering additional resources for education and reforming the aid architecture. One of the report’s important achievements is that it maintains a focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized throughout. This allows for a disaggregated understanding of many issues, including those related to gender. The report identifies protection as an important issue, especially in the context of gender in conflict areas – an insight that is too often missing from the debates on education. Another success is the identification of education’s potential to act as a force for perpetuating violence or peace, depending on the nature and content. The report fails, however, to identify the potential of education to act as force for maintaining gender unequal practices. This, again, is a reflection of an inadequate focus on gender equality issues throughout.

The following three subsections provide illustrations of the comments made in preceding paragraphs. It is important to point out that the gaps in the GMR are being highlighted due to the fact that gender issues fail to gain the attention they deserve unless their related implications are specifically underscored.

**Education for All goals**

The overarching message of the GMR is that despite notable progress made by many developing nations, the world is not on track in moving towards the EFA goals. Despite significant changes that have taken place in the reduction of gender disparities, being born female continues – and will likely continue – to be a disadvantage.

**Goal 1: Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.**

Early childhood care and education are critical for linguistic, social and cognitive development. There is no substitute for health and nutrition in the early years of life. Yet progress in tackling malnutrition has been disappointing. Although the under-5 mortality rate has been falling worldwide, progress has been uneven. It remains alarmingly high in certain low-income countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. In the absence of a clear policy focus backed by fund allocations, economic growth does not necessarily lead to a reduction in child mortality. For instance, while India has experienced a high growth in average income since the mid-1990s, the impact on malnutrition has been marginal.

The GMR identifies an important linkage: Poor progress in the expansion and coverage of comprehensive early childhood care and education programmes is a major reason for slow progress on the nutrition front. While access to pre-primary education has increased since 1999, it remains highly inequitable, with poor households having far less access than wealthier ones. As a result, enrolment rates are low and gender parity is high: the gross enrolment ratio (GER) is lower than 20 for sub-Saharan Africa and Arab states, while all regions except Arab states have attained gender parity in pre-primary enrolment. High investments are required to augment coverage, which is especially important in light of the fact that the poorest have the least access to early childhood care and education services. The relative share of private funding is high at this level, which makes it difficult for the poor to access. Poor interdepartmental coordination and lack of sectoral ownership are other important reasons for slow progress.

The report correctly calls for (i) clear links between early childhood care and education and later schooling participation, performance, learning and completion; and (ii) improved investment in girls’ education on the basis of strong links between maternal
education and children’s nutritional status and survival. It argues that “children born to more educated mothers are more likely to survive and less likely to experience malnutrition, and universal secondary education for girls in sub-Saharan Africa could save as many as 1.8 million lives annually.” The empowering impact of education often outweighs the negative impact of poverty and geography. Women’s access to public health services also makes a difference. The GMR also provides a number of examples of conditional cash transfers targeting women and direct nutritional intervention from Latin America and Asia having been successful in reducing the negative impact of poverty on children’s nutrition and mortality status.

**Goal 2: Ensuring that by 2015 all children – particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities – have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.**

Despite rapid progress made in some regions, the world is not on track to achieve universal primary education. In the recent past, the average rate of decline in the out-of-school population has slowed: From 1999 to 2009, it was approximately 6 per cent each year; between 2004 and 2009, it was just 3 per cent each year.\(^2\) If present trends continue, the GMR predicts that by 2015, the number of out-of-school children could be 72 million – an increase of 5 million over current levels. While the gender gaps in the out-of-school population have narrowed, girls still comprise 53 per cent of the total. Disparities are most pronounced in South and West Asia, where girls account for 59 per cent of children not enrolled in school. Research by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s Institute for Statistics indicates that more than 40 per cent of the current out-of-school children in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia will not enrol in school, and that girls will outnumber boys in that population. The GMR asserts that “being female, poor and living in a country affected by conflict are three of the most pervasive risk factors for children being out of school”.\(^3\)

Known barriers to girls’ education in many regions, such as early marriage, poverty and high perceived and real costs, and the perception that education is not critical for girls continue to cause persistent gender disadvantage. Getting girls to school is not the only issue: entry at the right age, survival and good-quality education are all important as well. In addition, tackling the issue of dropouts is crucial. A combination of strategies that include anti-poverty interventions, better health services and improvement in educational quality appears to have had a positive impact on enhancing the survival rates in schools. The GMR provides a number of successful examples from many parts of the world of non-formal alternatives. However, it also warns – and rightly so – of the risk of viewing low-cost, poor-quality education as a solution to girls’ education.

**Goal 3: Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.**

The number of out-of-school children for the lower secondary age group is declining, but the change has only been marginal in sub-Saharan Africa. The gross enrolment ratio for the whole secondary level is as low as 34 for sub-Saharan Africa and 54 for South and West Asia. The analytical table providing information on the numbers and gross enrolment ratios does not provide gender-differentiated data. However, the report presents an analysis based on trends in selected countries, which shows that urban males from wealthier families have better chances of completing secondary schooling –
with the exception of the Caribbean and Latin America, where boys have poorer chances as compared to girls.

The GMR analysis, based largely on the study of trends prevalent in the European Union and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, reveals that the economic downturn has clearly affected the job market adversely. Most forecasts suggest that higher levels of skills are important for avoiding unemployment and job insecurity. New job creations are likely to be concentrated in high-skill areas, while much of job destruction will take place in low-skilled areas. The report asserts that this will further marginalize poorly educated youth – especially those from socially and economically marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities.

The section does not delve into the gender dimensions of these trends. Information available elsewhere clearly indicates that there is a larger concentration of women in low-skilled, low-wage employment. This implies that women could disproportionately bear the brunt of unemployment if forecasts turn out to be true – but this insight remains unexplored. The report argues that “continuing education, vocational training and on-the-job training can bridge skills gaps, but countries vary in the level of support they offer – and in their level of ambition.” Yet there is no discussion of women’s access to continuing education, vocational or on-the-job training and gender-differentiated practices, if any. The risk of vocational education for women being gender stereotyped, as shown by evidence available elsewhere, has also not been touched upon. Although some of these have been discussed in the section on Goal 5, all of these issues are not sufficiently covered there either.

Goal 4: Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

The progress on the literacy front has been slow in most regions. Illiteracy is declining, but not fast enough – and most countries are likely to miss the goal. Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia account for about 73 per cent of the world’s adult illiterate population. Women continue to comprise two thirds of the world’s adult illiterates. The report argues that “women are far less likely to be literate than men, reflecting past and present inequalities in access to opportunities for education.” And irrespective of the overall level of adult literacy, female adult literacy levels are generally far lower in developing countries. While gender gaps in wealthier developing countries tend to be smaller, they often remain substantial. The report also adds that “gender is just part of a literacy divide that encompasses wealth, location and other markers for disadvantage; wealth effects and the rural-urban divide intersect with gender disparities.” Women living in urban areas or belonging to wealthier families are far more likely to be literate than poor or rural women.

The report identifies low levels of political commitment and inadequate public funding as major constraints. Certain nations in Latin America and the Caribbean emerge as exceptions to this general trend. The report also emphasizes the importance of appropriate local solutions in promoting literacy at a fast rate and provides examples of successful programming from several countries. The use of locally spoken languages to promote literacy among adults has emerged as a major successful strategy in many regions.
Goal 5: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

The section reiterates that “gender parity in education is a fundamental human right, a foundation for equal opportunity and a source of economic growth, employment and innovation.” Progress towards achieving gender parity at the primary level has been high in countries and regions that started with low bases, such as the Arab states, South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Yet a vast majority of countries are far from achieving the target in 2015. The situation is even less promising and more uneven across regions and countries at the secondary level, which are marked by low levels of participation and high gender disparity.

The report recognizes that gender disparities originate at different points in the educational system and provides several examples of varied origins. It also shows, however, that barring a few exceptions, most disparities can be traced to the primary level: late entry age, poorer retention and performance – and therefore higher drop-out rates – translate into lower transition to secondary level for girls. The barriers that operate at the primary level become more severe at the secondary level: early marriage and parental concern for safety are bigger issues for adolescent girls. Secondary schooling is also costlier, so if girls’ education does not command social value, parents opt not to send their daughters to school.

The report recognizes that increased labour market participation of women in the developed world has changed the social and economic landscape, and therefore examines the potential for education to facilitate a similar change in developing countries. Labour markets in developing countries, however, are highly discriminatory and often reinforce gender disparities, diminishing the returns to girls’ education, which in turn act as a disincentive for parents. Progress towards gender equity in the labour market has been slower than that in the school systems; gains in education are not always matched by gains in employment. Available evidence indicates that gender disparities in labour force participation for 17- to 24-year-olds are high in all regions, including Latin America and the Caribbean, where the secondary school participation rates are in favour of girls. The disparities are the highest in South Asia and lowest in Africa. The report also demonstrates that unequal remunerations reinforce unequal participation in the labour force.

Education can break labour market disparities only if educational processes and systems are successful in overcoming the gender disadvantages that girls face in society. The GMR argues that “public policy can make a difference in three key areas: creating incentives for school entry, facilitating the development of a ‘girl-friendly’ learning environment and ensuring that schools provide relevant skills. In most cases, simultaneous interventions are required on all three fronts.” The report advocates for the use of conditional cash transfers to act as incentives and also argues for the recruitment of female teachers and gender training of teachers in order to change attitudes. It does not mention, however, that gender training in many countries has been reduced to a mere tokenistic and perfunctory activity. In such circumstances, gender training fails to catalyse any substantive change in teachers’ attitudes and teaching-learning practices.

The report recognizes the importance of non-formal educational initiatives for out-of-school adolescent girls, despite wide variations in approaches and reach. These
initiatives, which are largely run by non-governmental organizations, tend to achieve results. They are therefore especially important in disaster and conflict situations. The section argues for providing girls with relevant skills, but warns against pushing them towards technical and vocational courses characterized by restricted expectations and limited opportunity. The report fails, however, to sufficiently elaborate on this, or link it to the trends and discussions held in the context of Goal 3.

*Goal 6: Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.*

Various international, national and sub-national surveys on educational quality reveal that averages are low in most developing countries. The divide between rich and poor countries in learning achievement is as wide as that seen in school enrolment. Wealth and rural-urban divides are high even within countries in some cases. Achievement levels are very closely related to household characteristics, showing the inability of the school system to offset the disadvantages associated with economically, socially or educationally marginalized backgrounds. The GMR rightly argues that the growth in enrolment rates experienced in many countries calls for an increased preparedness of the educational system to teach children from highly marginalized backgrounds. Mere equal treatment is not enough.

The GMR has not delved into the issue of gender divides in learning achievement as deeply as it has into the issue of geographic and socio-economic divides. Nevertheless, there are some references with important gender implications. The evidence of extra tuition improving the test scores for girls from poor families much more significantly than the modest improvement that tuition brings for children from wealthier households in Kenya indicates a need for strategies to help poorer children, especially girls, learn and perform better.

The report attempts to analyse the features of schools that have achieved high learning successes while also serving the children of marginalized groups. Although difficult to generalize, qualified teachers coupled with real teaching time and adequate resources in the classroom seem to make a difference in most cases. Equitable resourcing of schools by targeting the most marginalized areas, linking more effective teachers with disadvantaged children, effective teacher management to enhance motivation, remedial programmes and the use of appropriate language as the medium of instruction are important for children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The report emphasizes the use of regular, well-designed assessments and transparent results followed by action. The analysis, however, does not comment on the fact that some of these assessments are minimalist and fail to focus on the transforming elements of education. Any form of schooling must be assessed for carrying out the basics – reading, writing, numeracy and other related skills – but limiting assessments to these skills is insufficient. In addition, assessments should analyse whether educational processes are also acting as transforming processes for gender and other forms of inequalities.
**Armed conflict and education**

The overarching message in this section of the GMR is that the implications and impact of armed conflict on education have been widely neglected and underestimated. This neglect carries a heavy cost: the non-achievement of both EFA and the wider Millennium Development Goals. Gender disparities are significantly higher and gender-related violence and violations are among the most common features of all conflict-affected countries. Since mass displacement often follows conflict, the GMR analyses the issue of education for refugees and internally displaced people as well. Girls’ education in such areas face severe challenges; in many cases it means losing gains achieved in pre-conflict situations.

**The impact of armed conflict on education**

An analysis of 30 low- and middle-income counties affected by conflict during 1999-2008 reveals that these countries also have some of the world’s worst education indicators – far worse than countries at comparable income levels that are not affected by conflict. Based on a UNICEF report, the GMR estimates that more than 2 million children were killed in conflicts and 6 million were disabled in the decade prior to 2008. About 300,000 children are being exploited as soldiers and 20 million children have had to flee their homes as refugees or internally displaced persons. The enrolment and survival rates are significantly lower in these countries, which are home to 28 million, or 42 per cent, of the world’s total out-of-school primary-school-age children. Gender disparities are significantly higher at the secondary-school level. The analysis also highlights the fact that conflict exacerbates the wealth and gender inequalities experienced by many countries in non-conflict situations. It provides examples from several countries to substantiate the fact that girls in general, and poor girls in particular, are likely to bear the highest brunt of the adverse effects of conflict on education.

The report notes that conflict impacts education in several direct and indirect ways. One of the most direct ways is the loss of school infrastructure, teachers and school days. The demarcating line between civilians and the military has vanished and the use of indiscriminate violence against civilians has become increasingly more common in a large number of conflict areas. This has resulted in attacks on schools, teachers and children, in complete disregard for the gross human rights violations that such acts entail. Gaza, India, Iraq, Somalia, Sri Lanka, the Sudan and Yemen have all experienced such violence. The report also underscores the fact that armed groups in several cases have used attacks on schoolchildren and teachers as “punishment” for participation in state institutions. Groups opposed to gender equity in education have particularly targeted single sex girls’ schools in countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan.

According to the GMR, being a woman civilian in armed conflict areas is far more dangerous than being in the army. The widespread sexual violence that accompanies conflict severely impacts education, especially that of girls and women. Sexual violence has accompanied armed conflicts throughout history; examples include Bangladesh, Bosnia, Liberia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. Rape is used as a weapon of war, resulting in grave trauma. In analysing how rape and sexual violence impacts girls’ education, GMR 2011 concludes that “Girls subjected to rape often experience grave physical injury – with long-term consequences for school attendance. The psychological effects, including depression, trauma, shame and withdrawal, have devastating consequences for learning. Many girls drop out of school after rape because of unwanted pregnancy,
unsafe abortion and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV and AIDS, as well as other forms of ill health, trauma, displacement or stigma.”

Access to health care for those directly affected and others facing trauma is often missing in such situations, further exacerbating the ill effects. While women and girls are disproportionately affected, in some countries men and boys have also been targeted. The report identifies protection as an important issue and strongly argues for the criminalization of rape and sexual abuse, as well as for the strengthening of national and international reporting and accountability mechanisms in conflict areas. It calls for the creation of an International Commission on Rape and Sexual Violence headed by the Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women.

Those directly targeted are not the only ones affected. Sexual violence creates a wider atmosphere of insecurity, leading to a decline in the number of girls attending schools. Safety of girls becomes a major concern and continues to act as a barrier long after the conflict ends. Many families abandon girls and women because of the stigma and taboos associated with rape and sexual violence. The breakdown of families creates an insecure environment for children, impacting their education. Rape and sexual violence also remain highly under-reported. The GMR identifies cultural taboos, limited access to legal processes, unresponsive institutions and a culture of impunity as the main reasons for under-reporting. Weak international monitoring systems for rape and other sexual violence compound this reality.

Conflicts often involve the forced recruitment of children into armed forces, which creates another barrier to education. This is not only due to the absence of child soldiers from school but also to “the threat of abduction, the trauma involved, and problems of reintegration [which] have far wider effects.” The GMR recognizes that while child soldiers are invariably depicted as boys, girls are often involved as well. Angola, Mozambique and Sri Lanka are mentioned as examples. In some conflicts, abduction of girls for sexual exploitation and forced marriage has also been common.

Mass displacement and implications for education

Mass displacement is a common consequence of attacks against civilians, which has far-reaching implications for education. Refugees are often concentrated in the most educationally deprived regions, thus creating a challenge of providing education in areas that are otherwise also poorly served. High levels of gender disparity are a feature of many refugee camps. The GMR reports that, on average, there are about 8 girls in school for every 10 boys at the primary level, and even fewer at the secondary level. Gender disparities are particularly wide in camps in South and West Asia, especially in Pakistan, where 4 girls are enrolled for every 10 boys at the primary level. The ‘temporary’ nature of these camps, irrespective of the fact that they might continue to exist for years, may deter investment beyond the primary level. The situation for internally displaced people is worse, as there is no legally binding international instrument upholding their rights.

GMR also highlights the fact that the labour market access of refuges is often restricted, forcing them to opt for low-paying, low-status jobs. The report, however, does not delve into the gender implications experienced in many countries, where young girls and women refugees are often forced to enter into the sex trade and other such labour.
Education’s role in adding to the conflict or creating peace

The GMR recognizes the critical role that education can play in either “fanning the flames” of armed conflicts or in developing a “culture of peace and tolerance.” Education can exacerbate other causes that lead to unrest and conflict. Unequal access to education can cause widespread discontent. Education where all identities and languages are not respected and discrimination is common also creates frustration. Education is also often used to promote dominant ideologies that undervalue tolerance and respect for diversity, resulting in hatred. Therefore, the GMR argues, it is extremely critical to use the potential of education for developing a culture of peace and tolerance. As such, the report identifies four areas central to peace-building: language(s) of instruction; teaching of history and religion; curriculum development for peace and citizenship; and devolution of education governance.

While it is heartening that the GMR acknowledges the power of education to play both negative and positive roles in relation to conflict, it is nonetheless disheartening to notice the absence of any focus on gender in this context. This omission is especially significant in the context of conflict. Widespread use of rape and sexual abuse as a weapon of war reflects a prevalent, disturbing socialization and mindset towards women and girls that exist in these societies. This mindset is not a result of conflict, as deep-rooted gender images and symbols are very much part of societies and manifest during times of conflict. Education can maintain the status quo or play a transformative role in the context of gender as well. Hence, it is important to emphasize the need for developing the school as a transformative, gender-responsive institution during post-conflict situations as well in times of relative peace – a point that the GMR misses.

Financing of education and the aid architecture

Financing of education to achieve the EFA goals globally

GMR 2011 rightly notes that although increased financing does not guarantee success in education, chronic under-financing is a guaranteed route to failure. It adds that both developed and developing countries have largely failed to honour their pledges of increased funding for education – despite a real increase experienced in both national funding and the flow of funds through international aid. Most national governments have increased the fund flow to education, but notable variations exist; countries with similar levels of per-capita gross national product invest highly variable shares of national income in education. Of the 19 countries included in the GMR analysis, those who generally report larger gender disparities spend relatively lower proportions on education – a point that the GMR misses. This could lead to the proposition (subject to verification) that countries that spend relatively lower proportions of their gross national product on education tend to have higher gender disparities.

Rising domestic revenues have helped countries spend more on education, but the recent financial crisis has had an adverse impact on educational spending. Rising food prices have added to the problem, especially for poor countries and families. The GMR cites evidence from various regions to show that poverty and malnutrition have increased since 2008, which could have undesirable results on education. The report’s analysis of recent trends in 28 developing countries shows that 7 of them have experienced cuts in their education budgets in the recent past. Future fiscal consolidations could have adverse impacts on education financing. Countries are under
pressure to maintain or reduce their already low education budgets, which has severe implications for the EFA agenda.

GMR 2011 uses the more robust disbursement data rather than commitment data for analysing the aid flow to education. This indeed creates a clearer picture of real aid availability. The analysis reflects that although there has been a general increase in the aid flow during the past decade, many donors cut aid in 2009. The impact of the economic crisis is clear: Countries facing fiscal crises at home are finding it difficult to maintain their commitments abroad. Nevertheless, the report cites a number of examples of developed countries who have maintained their pledge to provide aid despite heavy cuts in domestic public spending. The report, however, warns against any complacency: In the face of cuts announced by many donor countries and the possibility of others not being able to keep their commitments if the crisis worsens, aid may not be a sure thing. The report hails the efforts made by both aid agencies and national governments to enhance aid quality. It also assails, however, the slow pace in moving towards the agenda set by the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005. The GMR also discusses the pros and cons of the innovative financing options that exist for education, and argues for their use if due research deems that they can add value to the existing system of official aid.

The GMR does not delve into the gender implications of these trends, but past experiences suggest that girls and women often disproportionately bear the burden of any such financial crisis – they are the first to be affected by malnutrition, the first to be withdrawn from school, the first to be affected by wage or job cuts, etc. It is important to assess the impact of the rising food crisis and economic downturn on girls and other vulnerable groups, as they are likely to suffer more.

Financing and aid for education in conflict and post-conflict situations

The discussion above makes it clear that non-conflict situations have their own set of concerns, including financial crises and the risk of reduced financing for education. Clearly, these concerns affect conflict areas as well – even as they face still greater challenges. First, conflict diverts resources from education. Many of the poorest countries spend significantly more on arms than on basic education. Aid can play a vital role, but priorities are distorted by the security agenda. “Humanitarian aid is intended to save lives, sustain access to vital services and maintain human dignity,” as the report states. Education is not perceived as an immediate priority within humanitarian aid. The report points out that natural disasters, such as the Haiti earthquake, usually attract greater response than long-suffering conflict areas. The analysis of the humanitarian aid in conflict areas also shows that education is characterized by the smallest percentage of requests attended to within the scope of humanitarian aid.

The GMR analysis also reveals that humanitarian aid is not necessarily well coordinated. While the situation is changing for the better, wider reforms are needed in the aid architecture. The need to rebuild education is often poorly assessed and planning cycles are too short to allow for long-term views. Based on the encouraging experiences of some post-conflict countries, the report lists the requirements for the reconstruction of the educational system, including withdrawal of user fees, rehabilitation of schools and classrooms and recruitment of teachers, community initiatives, recognition of returnees’ educational attainments, accelerated learning programmes, and skill training in disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and psychological support provision.
The GMR asserts that the demarcation between humanitarian and development aid is artificial and detrimental to the development of education in post-conflict situations. While humanitarian aid is essentially viewed as through a short-term lens, in many cases it has continued for years. This paradox does not allow for long-term planning based on predictable funding. Long-term recovery requires strong planning, information and management systems, financial commitments and a focus on building inclusive education. The GMR’s arguments for re-prioritization of aid towards education rely on achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the belief that prevention is better than cure. The GMR also argues for the need to reform the aid architecture and expand pooled funding in conflict areas. It cites a few examples of successful pooled funding outside the Fast Track Initiative structure and urges drawing lessons from there. It also hails the efforts of education clusters in making education part of humanitarian aid, and argues that it should play an even greater role and that a more comprehensive needs assessment for education in such areas is necessary.

While the GMR does not explicitly say so, it is obvious that any planning for education in conflict and post-conflict situations – including those for refugees or internally displaced people – will need to have very strong gender elements backed by adequate financing. Also, girls’ education can be sustained only when there is enough funding available for high-quality and equitable education as a whole.

Emerging key messages

It is important for UNGEI to choose its messages carefully so as to add real value. Drawing messages from the GMR has twin objectives: the short-term objective of advocacy with the EFA High Level Group and the long-term objective of strengthening its general advocacy through greater clarity and direction. The following messages have been identified with both these objectives in mind. The messages have also been guided by the strong interrelationships that characterize girls’ education. Given that education in conflict areas is the main focus of this year’s GMR, we begin with messages that emerge from the analysis of conflict situations. It is important to point out that that many messages coming from the analysis of conflict areas are significant for non-conflict areas as well.

1. Education is a human right for everyone, including girls and women.

The recognition of education as a human right is critical in all times, but especially so during conflict and post-conflict situations. Failures to protect educational institutions and children, especially girls, reflect failures to act on the recognition of education as a human right. This has far-reaching and negative impacts, not only on the girls who are denied their rights, but also for future generations. Evidence also suggests that the revival of education could also lead to faster recovery from conflict.

2. Protection is a crucial prerequisite for ensuring education, especially for girls. The involvement of women in monitoring rights violations and ensuring protection is an important way to bolster their confidence and increase effectiveness.

The widespread use of rape and sexual abuse as a weapon of war and the widely prevalent practice of kidnapping children for use by armed forces or groups underscore the need for recognizing protection as a crucial prerequisite for ensuring uninterrupted
education in conflict areas. Demand for stronger national and international monitoring and reporting mechanisms for protection in general, and in conflict areas in particular, should be increased. In addition to other measures, women’s participation in strengthening systems and processes for monitoring, reporting and addressing human rights violations at all levels – community, school, civil society, national, regional and global – is important for raising confidence levels and promoting gender concerns.

Protection measures are also important for many non-conflict situations. The report shows that long-known barriers such as early marriage, low value attached to women’s education, social taboos and others continue to adversely impact girls’ education. These issues also need protection measures that are built into educational strategies.

3. The demand for girls’ education is highly sensitive to household poverty and therefore responds well to well-designed conditional cash or in-kind transfer measures.

Overwhelming evidence from different parts of the globe suggest that conditional support initiatives linked to education and health programmes have led to significant change in girls’ participation rates. Cash transfers appear to have given greater flexibility to poor families; these conditions seem to have succeeded in changing health- and education-related practices.

4. Higher investment in early childhood care and education is crucial for promoting sustained girls’ education.

Early childhood care and education, including nutrition, is crucial for preventing dropouts and promoting learning in later years. The access of most disadvantaged children, including girls, is often limited as a result of the non-availability of publicly funded or other low/no-cost options of early childhood care and education programmes. Therefore, the need for higher investment in publicly funded or other affordable early childhood care and education programmes is high. Since early childhood care and education is outside the purview of education departments in many countries, there is a clear need for the improvement of effective interdepartmental coordination and functioning.

5. The notion of quality should be widened to include transformative, gender-responsive educational process and outcomes.

The quality of education goes beyond learning outcome scores, as important as they are. It is critical to widen the notion of quality to include concepts of gender-responsive teaching and learning. This would imply improving the assessments of educational quality by moving beyond learning outcomes to include transformative elements of learning processes. This change needs to be based on an understanding that educational curricula and processes can play a major role in changing a large number of gender-related practices, norms and beliefs, including sexual abuse and violence against women and girls.

6. Reduced gender disparities in secondary education and in labour markets are mutually reinforcing in strengthening gender equality.

Measures for gender equality at the secondary level could reduce the skill divide and consequent gender disparities in the labour market. Likewise, policies that remove segmentations and biases in labour markets could be instrumental in improving girls’ participation and influencing their subject choices in secondary education.

The GMR has reinforced existing evidence and provided new evidence that supports the argument that investment in girls’ education reaps far-reaching rewards. Children born to more educated mothers are more likely to survive and less likely to experience malnutrition. The GMR estimates that universal secondary education for girls in sub-Saharan Africa could save as many as 1.8 million lives annually because of its impact on improving nutrition and preventing HIV and AIDS. Strong advocacy is needed to maintain or enhance investment in education in the face of the economic downturn, as well as to protect vulnerable groups, including girls and women, from its impact on labour-market patterns and educational choices.

8. *Reform of the aid architecture is under way, but its pace needs to be accelerated, along with a renewed focus on gender and social equity.*

Considering that girls and women tend to bear a greater burden of conflict in society, an enabling aid architecture is critical for their well-being. Advocacy for aid architecture reform should take note of the following issues: the divide between humanitarian and development aid is artificial and needs to be challenged; educational and protection policies are often not recognized as integral parts of aid policy in conflict areas, but they are essential for the holistic well-being of children; the aid cycle for education in humanitarian aid needs to be longer in enable effective planning and implementation; pooled funding and coordinated monitoring enable much more efficient use of aid in conflict situations and in general; and the space for innovative financing for education needs to be examined.
References

1 For an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon through case studies in four countries, see Jha, Jyotsna, and Kelleher, Fatimah, Boys’ Underachievement in Education: An exploration in selected Commonwealth countries, Commonwealth Secretariat, London, December 2006.


3 GMR 2011, p. 40.


6 GMR 2011, p. 67.