All Girls Achieving and Learning
Policy Advocacy Agenda

“A world where all girls and boys are empowered through quality education to realize their full potential and contribute to transforming societies where gender equality becomes a reality.”

UNGEI Vision 2008

The United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI) is a multi-stakeholder partnership committed to improving the quality and availability of girls’ education and contributing to the empowerment of girls and women through transformative education. It is founded on an understanding that all girls have the right to learn in a safe and supportive learning environment. UNGEI, as a designated flagship of Education for All (EFA), strives to support governments and the international community to deliver on the gender-related EFA goals and education related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Our partners unite under the UNGEI umbrella with the belief that a collaborative advantage can be gained through collective efforts. Working together, UNGEI partners harness the benefits of collaborative advantage by:

- Linking efforts at multiple levels – global, regional and country.
- Bringing actors with diverse skills and competencies to the table.
- Applying a gender lens to the education and other related sectors.
- Articulating a collective voice to influence the global education agenda
- Developing a strategic platform for communication and advocacy support

UNGEI Policy Advocacy At A Glance

With the 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) fast approaching, UNGEI firmly believes that a critical education priority is all girls learning and achieving in order to meet the broader MDGs. An investment in girls’ education is integral to virtually all aspects of development and economic progress. Girls with higher levels of education marry later, have smaller families, survive childbirth at higher rates, experience reduced incidences of HIV/AIDS, and have children more likely to survive to age five. Educated girls have been shown to earn more, and contribute to social and political tolerance and higher rates of economic growth at the national level. Girls’ education may well provide the highest return on investment available in the developing world.
In order to maximize efforts which are the most needed and which will have the highest impact on girls’ education around the world, UNGEI is focusing policy advocacy efforts on four key strategic priorities:

1 **An Enhanced Focus on Marginalized and Excluded Groups:** Despite the gains, 57 million children of primary school age worldwide do not go to school and over half of these children are girls. Moreover, nearly three-quarters of girls out of school come from excluded groups, children with disabilities and from poor households, ethnic minority and language minority children and those living in emergencies and conflict-affected states. Evidence shows that disadvantage builds on disadvantage and gender gaps often widen among the poor and other marginalized groups. Being born into the poorest 20 percent of households is a universal source of disadvantage across all countries and being female is a significant multiplier of disadvantage, especially in countries in Africa and South Asia. However, the pattern of risk varies: girls of lower secondary-age are more likely to be out of school than boys, regardless of the wealth or location of the household. UNGEI believes that additional effort is needed to shine a light on the experience of girls from marginalized and excluded groups, to better understand the underlying causes of exclusion, to build awareness around the complexity and multi-dimensional facets of marginalization and to advocate for targeted strategies.

2 **The Reduction / Elimination of School-Related Gender-Based Violence:** Millions of girls around the world face violence and discrimination, in a variety of settings – including on the way to school and at school. School-aged girls are vulnerable to gender-based violence and in some regions of the world are often raped, sexually assaulted, abused, and sexually harassed. Yet, the nature of power relations between males and females as well as children and the perpetrators of violence, including teachers, and the fear of reprisals makes reporting a risky undertaking for children, and especially girls, with far reaching consequences – poor performance, irregular attendance, dropout, truancy and low self-esteem as well as physical harm and pregnancy. Child marriage, a pervasive socio-cultural norm in many countries also needs to be addressed as a priority; and education into secondary school is a proven strategy to delay the age of marriage. UNGEI is committed to addressing all aspects of school-related gender-based violence. A safe space for all girls to learn and fulfill their potential is a fundamental human right. Anything less should never be accepted.

3 **Improved Learning Outcomes for Girls:** Girls’ low levels of learning are symptomatic of a global learning crisis, where as many as 250 million children fail to read or write by the time they reach Grade 4. For girls as well as boys to learn, schools need to be adequately resourced with trained teachers and quality teaching and learning materials. Although overall learning outcomes are low across all groups in poor countries, there are disparities in learning outcomes according to gender, location and socio-economic status: poor, rural girls are the least likely to learn anything in school. Gender inequalities are reproduced in schools, limiting girls’ achievement and their life and career choices. Traditional and discriminatory gender roles can be reinforced through curricula and teaching materials and choice of subjects. Teachers, parents and girls themselves may have lower expectations for girls than for boys, which has strong influence on whether girls excel. UNGEI is committed to promoting policies that support gender-responsive teaching and learning practices, transform schools into empowering spaces for girls, and raises the learning achievement for all children.
Increased Number of Girls Transitioning to Secondary Education and Accessing Post-Primary Opportunities: More girls are in school today than ever before. Gender parity is closest to being achieved at the primary level; however, only 2 out of 130 countries have achieved that target at all levels of education. In some countries, girls’ transition to secondary school and other post primary opportunities remains a challenge; 97 countries have not met the MDG target on gender parity and in 43 of them, girls outnumber boys. Girls are significantly underrepresented at secondary level in the majority of countries in Sub-Saharan African and South Asia. Boys are disadvantaged in selected countries in the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean. Since secondary education is neither free nor compulsory, school fees represent a major obstacle for parents in keeping their children in school, thus increasing the risk of girls’ dropping out of school. In addition, deeply engrained socio-cultural barriers, such as early marriage and discriminatory gender roles may prevent them from continuing education. UNGEI believes that post-primary schooling is critical for equipping girls with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to transition to work or higher education, and to be healthy and productive citizens; hence access to post-primary opportunities and completion of secondary education should be a key ask for the post-2015 development agenda.

In order to make progress on each of the four policy priority areas, UNGEI will primarily use the following advocacy approaches to influence decision-makers at the global, regional and country levels:

Collective Advocacy: UNGEI will participate at key global, regional and country-level events to encourage political action, social mobilization and acceleration of support for girls’ education and gender equality.

Coordinated Action: UNGEI represents a diverse array of interests, from global development organizations and academic institutions to regional education bodies and local programs. UNGEI provides a platform that allows partners to connect with each other, reach out and form regional and country-based partnerships, and maximize educational benefits for girls and young women around the world.

Evidence-based Solutions: UNGEI will support the development and dissemination of research that will provide evidence needed to develop policy, allocate budgets, and implement programmes in a manner to support girls achieving and learning.

Sharing of Good Practice: UNGEI will act as a knowledge broker, providing partners and stakeholders with access to tools, good practices and experience, and allow for greater connectivity between individuals and organizations working in the field of girls’ education and gender equality.