World Teachers’ Day
East Asia and Pacific and South Asia Regional UNGEI Statement
Teachers for Gender Equality

Teachers guide individuals to become valuable members of society. Teachers educate, inspire and facilitate the learning process that helps build and shape nations. World Teachers’ Day is a global observance to acknowledge all teachers for their contributions to society. The joint East Asia and Pacific and South Asia Regional United Nations Girls’ Education Initiatives join the international community in celebrating the important role that teachers play in realizing this year’s theme of ‘Teachers for Gender Equality’.

Teachers help promote gender equality in education not by treating boys and girls the same but by appreciating and supporting their different needs, aspirations and potentials in the classroom. In South Asia, the presence of well-qualified female teachers can often be critical in encouraging and motivating girls’ access to and completion of education. In East Asia, the Pacific and Central Asia, the shortage of male teachers has been identified as one of the key factors in the low motivation, underperformance and high dropout rates seen in boys and male adolescents. Ensuring the presence, visibility and active engagement of positive role models for boys and girls is a key factor in improving gender equality in education.

The mere presence of same-sex teachers however, may not be enough to promote gender equality in education. Teachers – male and female - come with their own social-cultural values and practices, and may reproduce gender-stereotypes in the classroom without being aware. In addition, being a female teacher does not necessarily imply that gender issues are better addressed, or that male teachers are less gender aware. Gender discrimination and inequality in education will persist if teachers are gender-biased or fail to appreciate the diversity the different needs and aspirations of girls and boys bring to the classrooms.

Therefore, training in gender sensitive and responsive teaching must become an integral and regular part of initial and in-service teacher training, so that teachers will be able to appreciate and respond to the different learning and developmental needs of girls and boys in an inclusive manner. This will better enable teachers to support the development of their students’ full potentials to achieve gender equality in education.

Equality in the teaching profession must also be realized in order for teachers to be effective advocates for gender equality in education in the teaching profession. Studies show that countries with higher gender disparities have fewer female teachers. At the same time, the higher numbers of female teachers in the East Asia and Pacific region has not necessarily led to their improved status – female teachers in the lower education levels receive lower pay, while male teachers dominate the top hierarchies in the education system. The proportion of female teachers in the system at different levels is thus an equally important indicator of progress towards gender equality and empowerment of women through education. Inequalities in the teaching profession could be addressed by making working conditions more gender-responsive, by enhancing professional development opportunities - especially for female teachers - and increasing the number of female managers and leaders in the teaching force. Actively promoting gender responsiveness among both female and male teachers will improve gender equality in the classroom and the staffroom.

The East Asia and Pacific and South Asia Regional UNGEIs urge countries to ensure the provision of quality education - through quality teachers - for all, regardless of their sex, ethnicity, caste, income level, disability or any other factor which might impair a person’s enjoyment of the right to quality education. Education is a key tool to empower women and girls to realize their dreams – and a key tool in ensuring progress for all.

Investing in girls’ education is critical to securing greater numbers of quality female and male teachers in the education system. Governments should take concerted action to develop inclusive education policies and ensure equal rights and equal opportunities for girls and women. Such efforts must seek to address the cultural, institutional, and economic barriers that prevent women and girls from accessing education, in order to ensure lifelong-learning opportunities for girls and boys.

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The United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI) is the Education For All flagship for girls’ education and the principal movement to narrow the gender gap in primary and secondary education, and to ensure that by 2015, all children everywhere will be able to complete primary schooling, and that by then, girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education. UNGEI works through partnerships with organizations committed to these goals at global, regional, and country levels. To learn more about UNGEI, visit www.ungei.org.