

PRESS RELEASE

Bauchi State Government, FME, UNICEF and Civil Society Organisations launch Nigeria Girls' Education Initiative (NGEI) State Chapters to promote girls' education in Nigeria

NGEI launch is a sustained effort to improve girls access to education while addressing gender disparity in education in Nigeria

Bauchi, 28 March, 2008: In a concerted effort to address gender disparity in girls' education in northern Nigeria, the Bauchi State Government, the Federal Ministry of Education (FME), UNICEF and Civil Society Organizations, today at the Multipurpose Indoor Sports Hall in Bauchi, kicked off the launch of the Nigerian Girls' Education Initiative (NGEI) State Chapters in Nigeria. The launch of the NGEI was performed by the newly crowned Grand Patron of NGEI in Nigeria, Nigeria's First Lady, Hajiya Turai Umaru Musa Yar' Adua, in the presence of the Governor of Bauchi State, Malam Isa Yuguda; the Minister of State for Education, Hajiya Aishatu Jibril Dukku, the wives of four northern governors including the First Lady of Bauchi State, Hajiya Aisha Yuguda, UNICEF Nigeria Deputy Country Representative, Dr. Robert Limlim, and representatives of DFID.

In Nigeria, 10 million of the school age children are out of school. Most of them are girls.

The Nigerian Girls' Education Initiative, NGEI, an off-shoot of the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) launched in April 2000 at the World Education Forum in Dakar by the United Nations, is a collaborative initiative of the Federal Ministry of Education and Development Partners, particularly DFID, UNESCO, USAID and UNICEF, to coordinate efforts at improving girls' education in Nigeria.

The launch of the NGEI State Chapters in Bauchi is to recognize the leadership role that is being played by the incumbent first lady of the state in drawing attention to the gender disparities which exist in education against girls and to encourage all stakeholders to take definite actions to redress the imbalance.

"It is gratifying to note that three years after its inception, the Nigerian Chapter of the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative has become more proactive in enriching national dialogue on gender parity in education and women empowerment in our country," said Hajiya Turai Yar' Adua, Nigeria's First Lady. "We all have an abiding duty to join hands in this worthy initiative aimed at enabling the Nigerian girl-child optimally realize the potentials of her creative and productive capabilities."

Various interventions have been undertaken by Federal and State Governments, Development partners and civil society organizations as well as communities to promote girls' education in Nigeria. With support from the Norwegian Government, UNICEF in Partnership with government successfully implemented the African Girls' Education Initiative (AGEI) from 2001-2003. AGEI laid the foundations for the development of Strategy for Acceleration of Girls' Education in Nigeria (SAGEN) and then SAGEN Plus, with support from other major international development partners, which was launched by UNICEF and the Federal Ministry of Education in July 2003.

Currently, the Girls' Education Project (GEP), a major partnership between FME, DFID and UNICEF in support of girls' education, launched in December 2004, with a £ 26 million funding commitment from DFID, has recorded tremendous gains in girls' education in Nigeria. The project aims at eliminating gender disparity in education and further improving the quality of life of girls in Nigeria

through a collaborative approach to girls' education. The project is currently under implementation in six northern states of Nigeria (Borno, Jigawa, Bauchi, Katsina, Sokoto and Niger), covering 720 schools in a region where gender gaps are highest.

With the £ 26 million funding provided by the DFID, some of the identified barriers to girls' education such as poverty and economic issues; unfriendly child learning environments; lack of adequate classroom space, furniture and equipment; inadequate water, health and sanitation facilities; high pupil-teacher ratios and inadequate trained school teachers, are being addressed through the GEP project and other UNICEF interventions by the provision of conducive classrooms with desks and benches; separate ventilated improved latrines for boys and girls in schools, including hand pump boreholes; provision of books, learning aids and recreational facilities in schools and the training of teachers. Non-Formal education centres have also been supported alongside the GEP schools to provide in-come generation skills to girls and women without a chance for education to address the issues of poverty.

As a result of the above interventions and others from partners in specific focus areas, tremendous results in increase in enrollment rates have been recorded in promotion of girls' education. For example, in the GEP focus schools, the girls' enrolment rate has increased by an average of 78% from 2005. This has resulted in an overall reduction of gender gaps in the GEP focus schools from 23% in 2005 to 15% in 2007. Attendance rates have also improved, with an increment in the GEP focus schools from 81% to 85%, while that of girls has improved from 76% to 83% from 2005 to 2007 respectively.

"For Nigeria to achieve the goal of being among the largest 20 economies in the world, she must rapidly educate the children, most of all, the girls. Educating girls is known to be the basis for sound economic and social development. Educating girls produces mothers who are educated and who will in turn educate their children, care for their families and provide their children with adequate nutrition," says Dr. Robert Limlim, UNICEF's Deputy Representative. "Therefore educating girls translates to better health for the children, reduction in child morbidity and mortality, thus triggering off a snowball effect of achieving all the other MDGs in a sustainable manner."

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