

COMMUNIQUE

The Incheon Declaration recognizes that gender equality is inextricably linked to the right of education for all. This commitment is reinforced in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which launched an ambitious agenda for education and gender equality. The members of the UNGEI Global Advisory Committee met in Bamako November 17-19, 2015 to take forward this agenda, identifying the key roles and strategic contributions that UNGEI will make in advancing girls' education and gender equality within the new development framework.

The meeting was attended by more than 30 participants from over 21 organizations representing multilateral and bilateral development partners, international and regional civil society organizations and networks, as well as invited youth coalition representatives, technical experts and partners from West and Central Africa.

Mali's education experience provided a rich environment for this work. The Bamako *Day for the Advancement of Girls' Education*, convened by our hosts, the Government of Mali, UNICEF Mali and Plan International Mali and opened by the First Lady of Mali, brought together key government, civil society, religious and youth leaders and over 70 guests for an honest and critical dialogue on issues of gender and education. The participants recognized the progress and continuing challenges for girls' education in Mali and across the region. The meeting also reviewed a UNICEF-commissioned study of institutional and political barriers to girls' education in eight countries in West Africa, noting that key structures established to advance girls' education – for instance, gender advisors within the Ministry of Education and national strategies for girls' education – remain under-recognized, under-funded and disconnected from national priorities.

The members agreed that a singular focus on achieving gender parity has detracted from the critical gender equality issues in education around the world. Gender-based violence in school, early marriage, biased curricula, insufficient and poorly trained teachers, girls' achievement gaps and the lack of opportunities for out-of-school girls have slowed progress on national, regional and global commitments to girls' education. Attention to gender equality needs to be integrated systematically into education plans, policies and strategies, and government and civil society must be supported in capacity and resources to implement commitments.

Over the course of the meeting, we

- **Took stock** of UNGEI's impact at the global and regional level in 2015 with specific mention of gains in integrating gender equality in the Incheon Declaration, and the Education 2030 Framework for Action; effective joint advocacy to end School Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) and development of tools to support country responses; the benefits of cross-country partnership; and documentation and sharing of good practices globally, regionally and nationally to achieve the greatest impact.
- **Examined** the education and gender related SDGs and explored how UNGEI can strengthen country and regional processes to define relevant targets and means of monitoring.
- **Reviewed** current evidence on girls' education and gender equality from both research and experience; and discussed opportunities for UNGEI to analyse and disseminate new knowledge to address gaps in understanding.
- **Explored** the limitations of measures of parity to inform policy and program, and agreed to advance efforts to define and measure gender equality in education.
- **Examined** the importance of gender-responsive education sector planning, as a critical and essential process for achieving gender equality and improved education outcomes for girls.
- **Focused** on action, to systematically and sustainably increase meaningful participation of youth coalitions in UNGEI's governance and to bring the voice of children and youth to the table.

In conclusion, the participants commit to:

- **Enhance partnership and coordination at the national and regional level** in order to increase the strength of the UNGEI partnership and amplify shared learning between partners to best achieve members' individual and collective goals.

- **Implement and monitor the SDGs** as they relate to education and gender equality at all levels, with particular attention to supporting local actors to advocate for the prioritization of gender equality and girls' education across the development goals.
- **Sustain a continued** focus on UNGEI's Policy Advocacy Agenda to increase the number of adolescent girls transitioning to post-primary opportunities, focus on marginalized and excluded groups – particularly adolescent girls, reduce SRGBV and improve learning outcomes for girls.
- **Actively expand our work in defining and measuring gender equality in education**, complementing and enhancing the implementation of the SDGs by developing a measurement framework for gender equality in education and testing its impact at the country level.
- **Support gender-responsive sector analysis and planning with tools, policy, advocacy and country facilitation** in order to strengthen local capacity of governments and civil society alike and harness learning on what works and is cost-effective in realizing gender equality in education.
- **Finalize and implement a meaningful youth engagement strategy within UNGEI** to ensure that youth constituencies fully participate and share in decision-making in all of our activities.

UNGEI Global Advisory Committee Members

