Concept Note for UNGEI Conferences on Gender, Education and Development

“We re-affirm the vision of the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990), supported by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that all children, young people and adults have the human right to benefit from an education that will meet their basic learning needs in the best and fullest sense of the term, an education that includes learning to know, to do, to live together and to be. It is an education geared to tapping each individual's talents and potential, and developing learners’ personalities, so that they can improve their lives and transform their societies.”

“Education is a fundamental human right. It is the key to sustainable development and peace and stability within and among countries, and thus an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century, which are affected by rapid globalization.”

-- From the Dakar Framework for Action, adopted April, 2000

1.0 Background

In, April of 2000, at the same time governments and the development community adopted the Dakar Framework for Action, Kofi Annan launched the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative. At the time, he noted that 110 million children were out of school, two-thirds of whom were girls. Since then, according to the 2009 Global Monitoring Report, the number of children out of school has dropped by 32 percent to 75 million, and the proportion of girls among those out of school had also gone down from two-thirds to 55 percent. The gains of the last nine years have been made amidst a dramatically changing geopolitical landscape and despite increases in the incidence and intensity of global conflicts, natural disasters and economic crises.

On one hand, these advances are evidence of the resolve and commitment of governments and the development community to the Education for All (EFA) Goal 5 of “achieving gender parity by 2005, [and] gender equality by 2015” despite considerable obstacles. On the other hand, gender gaps in access persist beyond the 2005 target, and more significantly, parity alone is insufficient to enable progress toward the empowerment and equality to which governments and agencies have committed to through the EFA and MDG goals. More fundamentally, facilitating girls’ access to schooling by itself does not ensure their right to education outlined in Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Likewise, attention only to primary schooling is too narrow and focusing exclusively on girls misses a key piece of the puzzle. For education to yield the desired results, attention must also be paid to early childhood development as well as to post-primary opportunities and to boys’ educational experiences.

Empirical evidence illustrates that there are considerable obstacles to children’s access to early childhood care and education (ECCE). Substantial gender socialization happens in the pre-primary years, and curtailed access to quality ECCE represents a missed opportunity to promote positive masculine and feminine identities and foster affirmative relationships, behaviors and

attitudes between boys and girls. Of those children who do survive to grade five of primary school, boys and girls alike, relatively few of them make the transition to secondary school. According to the State of the World’s Children report (2009) in the least developed countries up to 74 percent of boys and 76 percent of girls do not attend secondary school; in all developing countries, the rate of those out of school drops only to 52 and 57 percent respectively.

This trend comes in the face of growing recognition and empirical evidence in the international community that, particularly in the poorest countries, primary schooling alone is not providing a sufficient foundation for the empowerment of girls or for their readiness for adult work and family responsibility in a rapidly globalizing world. Thus, the denial of the right to education on the basis of biological sex and gender stereotypes has a cascading effect throughout a girl’s life trajectory and can inhibit her ability to fully exercise those rights related to employment, health and marriage and family life guaranteed in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Since gender equality in education is also directly linked with achievement of other development goals, such as reduced child mortality, improved maternal health, and poverty eradication as well as the political and economic participation of women, persistent inequality throughout the educational arc inhibits more generalized development.

Governments, as duty bearers—and signatories to these Conventions—must facilitate gender empowerment systematically with both males and females at all stages of learning and through all cycles of life, both in school and other institutions outside the school.

In order to address the challenges highlighted above, it is important for countries to employ gender equity-oriented interventions as catalysts toward gender equality. With girls still trailing significantly in the school context and in subsequent life opportunities that accrue from quality schooling, it is crucial that focused efforts be made to examine the complex reasons for the persistent gaps. With this in mind, UNGEI seeks to create two fora, a face-to-face and a virtual conference, in which dedicated experts can collaborate on ways to address these gaps. These conferences seek to bring together the academic and theoretical understandings of the situation to inform and be informed by the day-to-day, on-the-ground experience of development practitioners and other partners.

The aim of these related conferences is to explore key questions around the intersections between gender, education, and development in an intellectually rigorous way to promote more pragmatic, efficient and effective programming and policy advocacy. Through the organization of these conferences, this project seeks to galvanize support and renew commitment among current and potential partners working towards achieving the gender- and education-related MDGs and EFA goals and the fulfillment of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and CEDAW.

2.0 Rationale
Although it is widely recognized that gender is an important aspect in the dialogue on equity in education, it is still difficult to convince people of the efficacy of investing in gender empowerment through education as a means to increase the overall quality of the education.

---

2 Loaiza Edilberto, Lloyd, Cynthia B. Adolescent and Education in Africa. Discussion Guide. Nov. 2008
system and influence positive progress on the other MDGs. Analyses show that wealth is, in fact, the single most important factor influencing whether families are able to send their children to school, with the poorest quintiles having the least access to education. While poverty is the single most important determinant of access to and persistence in school, poor girls are often more affected than are poor boys. In other words, gender disparities that already exist in the broader society compound conditions of poverty. Further, most out-of-school children are affected by additional disparities: ethnicity, caste, geographic location and disability, with gender usually exacerbating the situation. Nevertheless, the gendered aspects of poverty are rarely cited (cf EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009), the compound effects of multiple disparities are under-explored, and there is too little attention paid to how gender discrimination affects both girls and boys.

Research also shows that even within the context of male-dominated societies, men and boys are also affected by gender stereotypes. Whereas, it is often considered that emphasizing girls comes at the expense of boys, in reality moving toward gender empowerment for girls and women must necessarily involve men and boys.

There is thus a need to analyze these multiple disparities from a gender and rights perspective in order to create new entry points for addressing gender in education. This would serve to highlight the deeper issues in these forms of disparity as well as emphasize the importance of girls’ education, and its relation to other MDGs.

UNGEI, the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative, was launched in 2000 by the former United Nations Secretary-General and has a ten-year mandate. The EFA flagship for girls' education, UNGEI is a partnership that embraces the United Nations system, governments, donor countries, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, and communities and families; it works at global, regional and country levels. Its goal is to narrow the gender gap in primary and secondary education and to ensure that all children complete primary schooling, with girls and boys having equal access to all levels of education. With the EFA and MDG end-dates approaching, these conferences ask: Can we get there by 2015?

3.0 Goal and Objectives
The primary goal of these conferences is to advance dialogue and analysis around an issue central to realizing girls’ and women’s rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women in the area of education in developing countries. Between the in-person conference and the virtual conference, UNGEI seeks to engage the broadest constituency possible of global professionals committed to these goals, specifically targeting UNGEI’s partners and their networks, UN agencies, multilateral and bilateral organizations, academics from the North and South, governments, policymakers, media, civil society, non-governmental organizations, women’s groups, youth networks, teachers’ unions, faith-based groups, and national champions and activists.

Together, the conferences aim to achieve two objectives: (1) to renew and recommit to the gender-related actions agreed at the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar; and (2) to consolidate the public and policy debate needed around girls’ education to inform a broader understanding of the relationship between gender equity and disparity in education in developing
countries. Capitalizing on this event, UNGEI will host a side event to strengthen and expand the network of partners that the Secretary General envisioned in 2000, creating stronger ties to relevant agencies within the UN family and outward to civil society, including organizations focusing on boys and men.

In order to achieve this goal, UNGEI seeks to collaborate with a university program or department that specializes in gender, education and development. The ideal university partner would represent a center of study or research group (rather than a single person), all of whom have shared or complementary research interests in each of the three areas above and whose experience and areas of focus span all global regions. Collaboration of this kind for the purposes of the conferences draws on the comparative advantages of all segments of the community described above to enhance effectiveness of programming interventions and policy advocacy directions as well as to strengthen the relationship and coordination between each of these inter-dependent sectors.

There will be two venues for this discussion, an in-person conference to be hosted at UN Headquarters and a virtual conference to be hosted either by UNICEF or by the partnering university.

**In-person Conference**
The in-person conference will be limited to 100 participants in New York and will be organized around a series of commissioned papers on the designated conference topic. The small size of the conference will enable robust interaction among the participants during the two-day event. Panels will be organized along themes and will be held sequentially. This event will be held at United Nations Headquarters to facilitate the highest possible participation from among UN colleagues.

There are two potential timing scenarios for this in-person conference. In the first, the conference would take place during the first week of November, 2009. In the second scenario, the conference would take place in the first quarter of 2010. Potential partners should include in their proposal their vision for each scenario, with special attention to how the timing impacts the process and outcome.

**Virtual Conference**
The virtual conference will allow stakeholders from a range of development constituencies world-wide to contribute to, and deepen, the dialogue and information-sharing at the face-to-face conference. The virtual conference will reach participants via formats such as, but not limited to: e-discussions, viral video, youtube.com or other similar platform, and document sharing. In addition, audio and video materials and presentations made by key experts may be made available to those virtual participants who have access to those technologies. While the specifics on the web component and the related technologies that are to be employed are yet to be decided, the virtual conference will be designed for easy access by participants in all regions.

The virtual conference will either precede or follow the in-person conference and accordingly will be organized to serve different ends. If the virtual conference takes place prior to the face-to-face conference, it will serve as a platform for participants to discuss issues and generate ideas.
in advance of the conference in New York. This will enable participants to shape the dialogue at the in-person discussions by providing concrete contributions and specific recommendations on the way forward. If the virtual conference is held after the face-to-face conference, it will harness the momentum of the New York session by serving as a follow-up to generate feedback and provide an opportunity to the participants to review and finalize the outcome of the face-to-face event. The final decision regarding which format to utilize will be made collaboratively between the UNGEI Secretariat and the university partner.

4.0 Logistics
The responsibilities for each of the conferences and their follow-up will be divided between UNGEI and the collaborating academic institution according to the following parameters.

4.1 In-Person conference
Two days
Consecutive not concurrent presentation format
Up to 100 participants comprised of partners, academics and practitioners
Held at the UN Headquarters
By invitation
High-profile keynote speakers

UNGEI will:
• Make all arrangements at UN Headquarters;
• Manage all communication for existing UNGEI partners;
• Arrange keynote speakers and other dignitaries;
• Select critical topic from university proposals (see below)

University will:
• Develop situation analysis (about 5 pages) summarizing the key gender, education and development issues from Dakar to present.
• Identify 3-5 critical topics for discussion related to gender, development and education (possibly the gendered aspects of violence, emergencies or disparities such as poverty, location, disability, ethnicity, caste etc.);
• Write the call for papers after UNGEI has selected the conference topic;
• Establish a list of appropriate academic institutions and individuals from which_whom to request proposals;
• Select from among the received proposals for inclusion in conference;
• Decide the most suitable organization of the conference;
• Manage all communication with authors;
• Organize all panels for maximum impact and synergy

4.2 Virtual conference
UNGEI will:
• Decide on timing for this component
• Publicize through network’s e-discussions;
• Enlist participation of key participants
**University will:**
- Propose most advantageous timing for virtual conference, to precede or follow in-person event;
- Structure the components of the virtual conference to complement and amplify the content from the in-person conference (these may include but are not limited to: asynchronous discussion forums, video presentations, document sharing, live chats by region or theme);
- Design necessary web-components;
- Manage web-discussions, (depending on technical capacity and facilities also host discussions)

### 4.3 Post-conferences
**UNGEI will:**
- Manage logistics related to publication of resulting book and/or journal

**University will:**
- Oversee all aspects of selecting and editing commissioned papers for publication

### 5.0 Budget
Institutions submitting proposals for consideration should submit an estimated budget for each of the two potential scenarios. In addition to standard costs associated with conference planning, institutions should include estimated costs for necessary travel for their teams at the time of conference and as they deem necessary in the months preceding it. Creative costing solutions are encouraged. For example, incorporating mechanisms in which participating graduate students are compensated through course credit or a practicum is encouraged.

*UNGEI Secretariat*

*April 2009*