

**Transition to Post-Primary Education: Focus on Girls**  
**UNGEI Regional Meeting for East and Southern Africa**  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

*Speech given by Kenya's Assistant Minister of Education, Honourable Beth Mugo*

*Accompanying PowerPoint presentation can be found here:*

[http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/unicefesaro\\_TransitiontoPPEducationFINAL021707.ppt](http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/unicefesaro_TransitiontoPPEducationFINAL021707.ppt)

1. Title Slide
2. Ladies and Gentlemen, The time is NOW! The time to promote Post-Primary Education in the region of East and Southern Africa is NOW. UNGEI partners in this region have faithfully promoted basic education for all children for nearly two decades. As a result, the number of girls and boys across the continent with basic literacy and numeracy skills has increased dramatically.

NOW we must also turn our attention to girls' and boys' Transition to Post-Primary Education.

--Post-primary education is a human right, it reaps important rewards, and it must be given high priority in *all* countries.

--Post-Primary Education is *especially critical* for girls, but there are barriers to Post-Primary Education that we must address.

--UNGEI can play an important role in dealing with those barriers; we can make a difference.

3. Post-Primary Education refers to more than just "secondary school." It includes *all* learning opportunities for adolescents:

-- formal schooling in lower and upper secondary that may be followed by higher education;

--vocational and technical education, and job training;

--life skills, health education, and income generation programs.

4. Post-Primary Education is a human right;

--it is important to improve the health and life chances of individuals, families, and communities;

--it is important for economic, social, and political development;

--and it is necessary for reaching the goals of EFA, UPE, MDGs.

5. Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that education is a human right until the age of majority (or age 18). In the CRC, signatory nations – all of us here – are urged to “eliminat[e] ignorance and illiteracy. . .and facilitat[e] access to scientific technical knowledge. . .” by --encourag[ing] the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, mak[ing] them available and accessible to every child (CRC, Article 28.) Gender differences in participation and achievement are more pronounced at the post-primary level, so the commitment to achieving gender equity must receive high priority.

6. Post-primary education is key to improving the life conditions of individuals, families, and communities. We know from research that education beyond primary is correlated with having healthier families and lower fertility rates. When educated young people eventually have children, they are more likely to send them to school for longer periods of time. Conversely, a lack of post-primary options further marginalizes those youth who already are disadvantaged, and it adversely affects their life chances.

7. Post-primary education is a key to development. The development of advanced knowledge, skills, and competencies are essential to success in the job market in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and they are important for the next generation to be able to participate

effectively in civil society (Lewin, 2005). International development in an era of globalization requires an increase in the amount of knowledge in mathematics and literacy and in the level of job skills and critical thinking skills that individuals need. Given our shrinking world, all individuals need to have a more sharply focused understanding of the consequences of their actions in both the global context and in the local environment, in order to fully engage in civil society and in political and social change.

8. Post-primary education is a key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals for education and gender empowerment, and the goals of Education for All by 2015. It is necessary for sustaining Universal Primary Education. Unless a sufficient number of teachers is trained in secondary school to teach in primary school, UPE will not continue.

9. In short, this generation and the next will need education for more basic literacy and numeracy. Post-primary education is necessary so that our daughters and granddaughters, our sons and grandsons will be able to build a strong civil society, have healthier families, develop more sustainable economies and stronger governments, protect the environment, and build peaceful societies at a time in history where cultural and human rights are becoming more complex.

10. Post-Primary Education is *especially critical* for girls. Despite a sincere commitment to achieve Education for All, there is a huge gender gap in secondary schooling: In African countries only one in five girls enroll in secondary school (GCE 2005: 54), and countries have large gender gaps. Boys continue to have higher transition rates to secondary school than girls, and even in the five countries of southern Africa with

relative gender parity, having equal numbers of girls and boys in school does not mean gender equality has been achieved.

11. Benefits and Barriers. Girls' benefit from Post-primary Education in many ways, but many barriers also prevent girls from having access to quality Post-primary education.

12. The Benefits to Girls of Post-primary Education are numerous. They include: the improved health and well-being of the young woman and of her smaller number of children; economic benefits, such as new skills for paid work; and a kind of authority that is not available through traditional means (Stambach, 2000). Another benefit to young women is the empowerment that can come through emancipatory knowledge in Post-primary Education, which includes such things as an adolescent girl developing an understanding of her rights, of norms that restrict her empowerment, and of sexuality. It also involves avoiding HIV/AIDS. Although the relationship of education and HIV/AIDS is complex, "Simply keeping girls in school longer is an effective defense against HIV. Studies in Uganda and Zimbabwe have found that girls who received primary and some secondary education had lower HIV infections rates than those who did not attend school, a trend that extended into early adulthood" (DeWalque 2004, as cited in Save the Children 2005: 13, endnote 25).

13. Although we may be convinced of these benefits, we also know that many barriers to Post-Primary Education exist, especially for girls – barriers that are overlapping, intertwining, and cut across sectors. Since secondary school frequently involves school fees, one of the chief barriers to Post-primary education, especially for girls, is poverty. Children from the richest top one-fifth (20%) of households in Sub-Saharan Africa, on average, are more than 11 times more likely to reach Grade 9 than those from the poorest

two-fifths (40%) of the households. And among the poorest two-fifths (40%) of the population, four boys are enrolled in Grade 9 for every one girl (Lewin, 2005). Poverty is a major barrier for all youth, and especially for girls.

14. Other barriers to Post-Primary education exist at the level of the education system. These include: a lack of schools or learning centers; not enough teachers for post-primary classes; and a lack of adequate and appropriate long-term plans. (For example, 11 countries in the region have Sector-wide Approaches or SWAPs, others do not). And obviously there is fierce competition for the limited resources that exist to fund both basic education and the increased demand for post-primary opportunities, as more children complete basic education.

15. Barriers also exist at the school level. These include poor quality of curriculum, textbooks with gender biased images, and teachers who deliver gender-biased instruction. Adolescent girls have particular life cycle and age-specific needs; for example, concerns associated with puberty, pregnancy, childrearing, marriage, and reproductive health, as well as an interest in economic sustainability. A relevant curriculum and life skills education that addresses these issues is critical. Other school-related barriers include a lack of facilities, such as privacy for girls during menses; and gender violence, such as harassment and rape. Barriers also exist at the family and household level, such as gendered cultural norms, which assign care-giving roles at home to girls and give boys greater freedom to complete their studies.

16. UNGEI can make a difference. UNGEI can advocate for the expansion of Post-primary Education in the region, and for gender parity, gender equity, and gender equality within the system. How? First, we can use the lessons we have learned from

Education from EFA and Basic Education. We need to pay attention to access and quality simultaneously. We need to use a system-wide approach to do this and we need to develop a “seamless system” of post-primary education, where the lines between the different kinds of education—formal, nonformal, informal—become increasingly blurred, so that girls’ and boys’ educational needs can be met in a variety of ways, using a variety of approaches, and involving a variety of participants. In this way, as life conditions change, students can move back and forth from system to system as needed. A seamless system will increase access and completion, and encourage higher quality overall. We need to Focus on gender and on girls in Post-primary throughout, ensuring the involvement of partners and stakeholders in policy and planning discussions.

17. UNGEI can make a difference! There are challenges, to be sure. 21 million girls and boys on our continent still are not enrolled in primary school. We cannot forsake our concern for basic education, but we dare not ignore the need to expand post-primary education, to develop a seamless system of Post-primary education to fulfil the rights and to meet the needs of the millions of young women and young men who will be ready to pursue Post-primary educational opportunities in the years ahead. UNGEI partners can ensure that all partners and stakeholders are involved in policy and planning discussions to this end. Ladies and Gentlemen, we can make a difference; we *must* make a difference. The time is NOW!