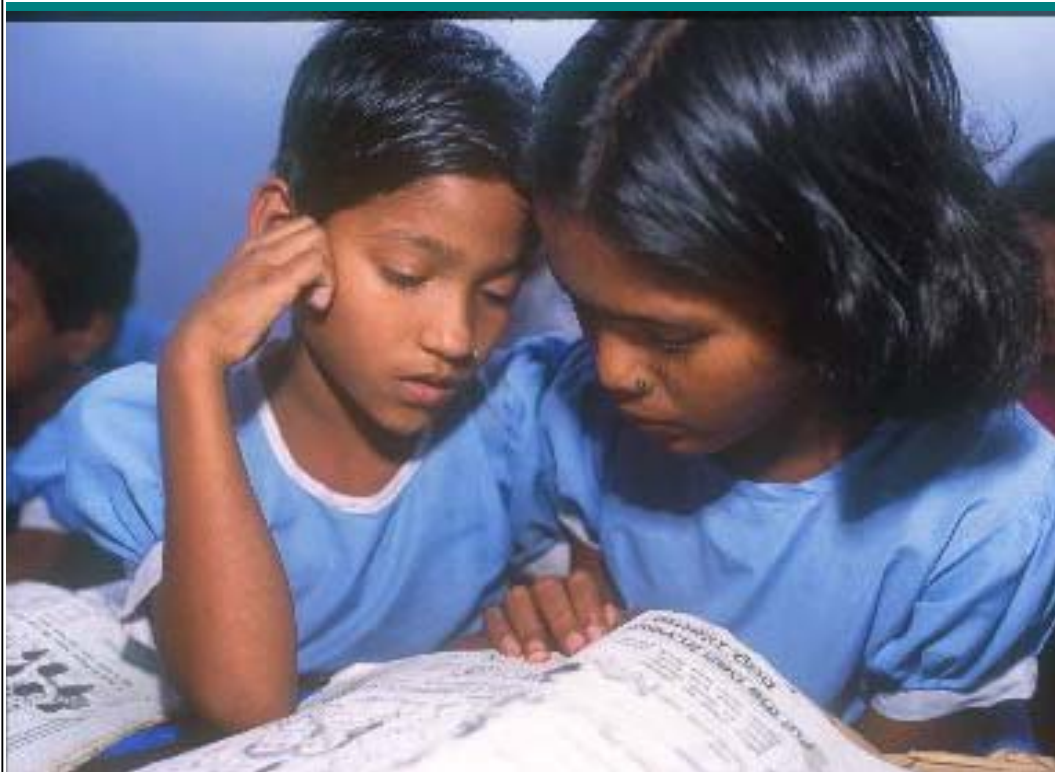


UNITED NATIONS GIRLS' EDUCATION INITIATIVE (UNGEI) IN BANGLADESH



Consultation Meeting Report



September 2008



UNGEI IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is welcoming the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) with open arms. This was evident at a two-day Consultation Meeting organized by UNICEF Bangladesh on 16-17 September, 2008. Given the country's achievement in attaining gender parity in enrolments in primary and lower secondary schools, the question arises as to why Bangladesh still needs a network to promote girls' education.

Stakeholders engaged in the promotion of education, especially of girls, including representatives of the Directorate of Primary Education, partner institutions, NGOs, academia, media, UN agencies, and UNICEF's Young Champions, all came together at the Consultation Meeting to respond to that question. They also came up with the way forward for the UNGEI partnership in Bangladesh.

Why does Bangladesh need a partnership for girls' education?

With a population of over 130 million, Bangladesh has nearly 20 million children of primary school age – ages 6-10. Almost half of this number is girls.

There have been tremendous efforts in the past decade in getting more girls into school, but the percentage begins to decline in the secondary years. When the number of girl drop outs is added to the number of girls who have never enrolled, it becomes apparent that **there are still approximately 1.5 million primary age girls out of school.**

Some statistics on girls' education in Bangladesh

During the '90s, Bangladesh recorded remarkable achievement in primary education with net and gross enrolments increasing by over 20%. Girls' enrolment increased by over 30% during the period. However, during the past several years progress has stagnated. Girls' net enrolment in 2003 was 84% (compared to 81% for boys). The poor quality of schooling is reflected in poor attendance, high repetition rates, high drop-out rates (37% for girls and 38% for boys) and low achievement.

About 33% drop out in the primary level. Only about 50% of children enrolled in class six reach class ten, and 40% actually manage to complete secondary levels of education. The proportion of boy and girl child workers in the age group of 5 to 17 years is 73.5% and 26.5%. This means that a huge number of children are out of school and among them a major section are girls. The situation is worse in urban slum areas where 26% of primary school age girls have never enrolled. The enrolment rate in urban slum areas is only 61%, which is 23% lower than the national average.

In secondary education, enrolment rates of girls have improved over the years. Still, about a third of girls aged 11-15 are out of school, and nearly half of the girls who enroll in secondary schools drop out before completing class ten. Enrolment of girls in vocational and tertiary levels of education is much lower than of boys.

Girls are also getting madrassa education. There are over 34 lac students studying in various madrassas in the country and of them almost 50% are girls. It is a matter of debate whether madrassa education is girl friendly.

The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) is a global endeavor to ensure that the right of all girls to quality basic education is fulfilled. It is a part of a 10 year global initiative which embraces a wide network of international partners as a global flagship for girls. UNICEF has been named by the UN Secretary General as the lead agency globally for UNGEI.

Socio-cultural factors like attitudes, behaviours, social environment and physical facilities for girls' education are still major issues to be addressed. To fulfill the objectives of Girls' Education in Bangladesh, well thought out strategies will have to be implemented. And this is where the UNGEI Partnership could play a significant role.

At the country level, UNGEI is intended to support country-led development and to influence decision-making and investments to ensure gender equity and equality in national education policies, plans and programmes. It operates as a mechanism to advance education strategies and technical capacity to assist countries. It mobilizes resources for both targeted project interventions as well as large scale systemic interventions designed to impact on the whole education system. UNGEI streamlines its efforts through the strategic use of existing mechanisms such as Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS), Sector-Wide Approaches (SWAPs) and the UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF).

By setting up the UNGEI Bangladesh Partnership a platform would be created for promoting girls' education made up of government, donors, UN agencies, NGOs and civil society members who are active in girls' education, facilitated by UNGEI regional partners. It would provide a window of opportunity to raise the profile of girls' education.

When the stakeholders sat down at the Consultation Meeting it was with the idea that the Bangladesh Partnership will do something that other partnerships and networks are not doing. It could be an institutional mechanism to track gender equality issues in a cross sectoral manner and provide coordination among national policies. It could also advocate for further desegregation of data as there is a need to look at aspects like who are the children in school (including socially excluded groups), their social context, their language etc. It is felt that the Partnership has to go beyond gender parity and look at what else needs to be done. It needs to be realistic and at the same time have a value added to all the current initiatives in the field of girls' education in Bangladesh.

Gender parity is not gender equality. Gender parity is necessary but not sufficient to achieve gender equality. Gender equality in education is a human right. It is a cross-cutting theme because a complex process influenced by numerous factors in the life of the child and family determine whether a girl is enrolled in school, drops out or is withdrawn from school.



The Bangladesh Setting¹

Bangladesh has one of the largest primary education systems in the world with 78,363 primary level educational institutions². Since 1990, primary education has been free and compulsory for all children and there has been steady increase in girl children's gross enrolment (e.g. from 92% in 1995 to 97% in 2001). In fact, the net primary school enrolment rate for girls (84%) is higher than for boys (81%)³. But there are still 3.5 million children who are either not enrolled in school or have dropped out.

There are some initiatives by the government to encourage girls' education, e.g. the Female Secondary School Assistance Project, the Stipend Project, the Secondary Education Development Project, and the Female Secondary Education Project. The problem however is access and equity. Creation of equitable environment for children who are left out including the working children from extremely poor households, children who are physically and mentally challenged, children of urban and slum dwellers, children of inaccessible rural areas and the Chittagong Hill Tracts etc. is a big challenge for girls' education. Poverty is another challenge. When families struggle to find the money for school fees, uniforms and books, girls are the ones who suffer. They stay at home to help earn money or look after younger siblings, or just do not get priority. Many families opt to keep their girls from school simply because they do not believe that girls need or should have an education.

Girls' enrolment is higher at the primary level, but is still significantly low at the secondary level. This is due to the big drop out at grade five as well as the low achievement rates at the primary level, which put them at a disadvantage when entering secondary school. So girls are more likely than boys to drop out from secondary school, especially in the rural areas and among the urban poor. This in fact is also influenced greatly by the lack of social security for girls in rural areas where schools are located far away and cannot be accessed easily. Girls going to school in such areas are often victims of eve teasing and other forms of violation.

Despite quantitative improvements, the quality of education, curriculum content and learning achievements have remained serious concerns. The rates of enrolment and parity do not show what children are actually learning. Due to poor quality of primary education, achievement and competency levels of most children are very low. Before completion of secondary school, girls drop out due to the inadequacy of the facilities at school. Drop out and low enrolment rates are also affected by the fixed hours of government run schools. Children in rural areas are often needed by parents to help out with domestic chores or bring in some money during lean periods, and so they cannot go to school.

This then is the current girls' education scenario in Bangladesh.

It is possible to widen the scope of primary education to play an important role in the national economy. But failure to significantly improve its quality has contributed little to enhance its relevance. Parents ask "what good does it do to send our children to school? They come back with nothing – they can't use their five years of education." So it is very important to make education meaningful.

¹ The content of this section is based mainly on a presentation by CAMPE at the Consultation Meeting

² Primary education statistics in Bangladesh, 2002

³ Primary education in Bangladesh, The Directorate of Primary Education, Government of Bangladesh, 2002 and 2003.

The Consultation Meeting – what it was all about

Briefly speaking, the Consultation Meeting was the first concrete step towards reviving the spirit of UNGEI in Bangladesh. Over two days, the stakeholders took part in an intensive process that was at the same time entertaining, exciting and productive. Government commitment to take the initiative forward was apparent from the encouraging presence of government officials at the inaugural session and their words of support. At the conclusion of the inaugural, the importance of girls' education was driven further home by a video show called 'The Girl Effect' produced by the NIKE Foundation.

During the course of the day the stakeholders learnt about the UNGEI concept as well as the progress made by UNICEF Bangladesh in taking UNGEI forward. For example, UNICEF Bangladesh has developed six 'Young Champions', four of whom have received basic training, ToT and refresher training from the UNICEF Regional Office in South Asia (ROSA). These Young Champions in turn have developed 27 other Young Champions and produced a video show. Progress of UNGEI in Bangladesh also includes a study on the country situation related to girls' education.

An NGO perspective of the current country status on girls' education was also shared at the Meeting. The first day was concluded with a live interactive popular theatre show which is a part of the communication initiatives of UNICEF Bangladesh to promote girls' education. There was also a viewing of an episode of a drama serial with the enter-educate approach. All proceedings of the day generated much discussion among the stakeholders.

The second day, which involved everyone in even more interesting and intense activities, also generated much discussion. Before going on to group work to come up with the way forward for the Bangladesh Partnership, the UNGEI best practice case studies from Afghanistan, Cambodia and Uganda were shared so that ideas could be picked up by the stakeholders to add to their own action ideas for the Partnership. The group presentations, which were thoroughly discussed, were followed by a session on identifying the potentials and challenges of institutionalizing the Partnership. Before the Meeting was wrapped up, the co-chair from the NGO sector for the Partnership was nominated. It was decided that UNICEF would send nominations for the co-chair from the government. It was also decided that the Working Group, once formed, would select a suitable name for the Bangladesh Partnership.



Ms Raka Rashid, UNGEI Focal Point, UNICEF Regional Office of South Asia (ROSA) talking about the objectives of the Consultation Meeting at the inaugural session.

Consultation Meeting Objective:

The objective of the Meeting was for stakeholders to brainstorm about the positioning of UNGEI in Bangladesh. More specifically, the Meeting was to:

- ❖ Identify co-chairs for the UNGEI Bangladesh Partnership.
- ❖ Agree on the areas of focus for the Partnership in the light of MGD 3 (gender equality), and in the light of the multiple and overlapping factors which determine whether a girl enters school and how long she stays there.
- ❖ Identify the next steps to take the Partnership forward in Bangladesh.

At the Inaugural



"We take pride in saying that Bangladesh has achieved gender parity at the primary and secondary levels, but the challenge is in achieving quality of education. We are trying to focus on this issue, particularly on equity in quality education. UNGEI could help in achieving this. I would like to request the civil society groups to lobby and do advocacy with public representatives of the upcoming election to demand focus on equity in quality particularly for the deprived population. The other request is to continue working on this issue because even if we have achieved certain goals many remain to be fulfilled." – Ms Rasheda K Choudhury, Hon'ble Advisor in-charge, Ministry of Primary & Mass Education (MoPME), Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) and Ministry of Cultural Affairs



"Business as usual or incremental progress, as seen in the past, will not be sufficient to develop an education system that can ensure a bright future for Bangladesh. Bringing changes in the education system will require sufficient allocation of financial resources. Even more importantly, it will require the mobilization of all segments of Bangladesh society. It is in this area that UNGEI can add value to existing mechanisms and networks." - Mr Carel de Rooy, UNICEF representative in Bangladesh.



"This year the pass rate for Higher Secondary Certificate examination is 76.16% which is 10% higher than that of last year. What is more interesting is that the number of girls obtaining GPA 5, 4, and 3 are much higher than the number of boys, at least by 2%. The Government's efforts to both increase the access to education and improve the quality of education are visible. UNGEI in Bangladesh is an integral part of the EFA initiative. The Government has committed to achieve the goals of MDG and its own goals. Let us all work together to close the gap between genders." – Mr ATKM Ismail (left), Additional Secretary, Ministry of Education

"Universal pre-primary education occupies a central place in Bangladesh's effort in social development. The government approved gender action plan with guidelines to achieve equity and equality in girls' education is being implemented in Bangladesh. There is no tool more effective than giving education to girls. No other policy is likely to raise economic productivity, bring down infant and maternal mortality or improve nutrition and health. No other policy is as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generation." – Mr Quazi Akhter Hossain (right), Additional Secretary, Ministry of Primary & Mass Education (MoPME).

The thematic areas and issues

The framework for organizing UNGEI's strategies is seen as **Breaking the Cycle** that threatens girls' educational advancements in the following thematic areas drawn from partner consultations:

- ❖ **Poverty:** where girls become the last priority
- ❖ **Illiteracy:** educated mothers break the family cycle of illiteracy
- ❖ **Inequality:** only high quality education allows girls to stay in school
- ❖ **Exploitation:** domestic, hazardous child labour and trafficking of girls
- ❖ **Discrimination:** when gender inequalities are socially acceptable
- ❖ **Violence:** growing evidence of epidemic proportions in homes and schools
- ❖ **Emergencies:** demonstrate the need to specifically target girls' needs
- ❖ **Glass Ceiling:** equality outcomes sought through and after education
- ❖ **Marginalization:** rural and ethnic/minority girls mean double deficits
- ❖ **Gender Blindness:** broken promises in gender responsive policies and budgets
- ❖ **HIV/AIDS:** gender inequality has a critical role in the spread of HIV/AIDS

The UNGEI Bangladesh Partnership will deconstruct these themes to the country's own goals and workplans. For Bangladesh the main focus is on i) barriers to gender equality (addressing discrimination, marginalization, exploitation, and glass ceiling); ii) improving quality of girls' education (addressing poor quality, marginalization and illiteracy); and iii) gender mainstreaming in the education process (addressing gender blindness).

At the Consultation Meeting, the stakeholders also came up with some areas of concern:

- ❖ Relevance of curriculum, which influences the quality of education. In fact, content load is becoming a serious problem, particularly in private schools, as well as the use of different kinds of curriculum. The Partnership could take up the matter of curriculum reform.
- ❖ There is a growing fundamentalism in the country and their influence in the education sector is very challenging.
- ❖ A small sample study by UNICEF has revealed that there was no indication whether stipends makes any difference to the retention or performance of girls at school. However, it shows that it brings girls to school.

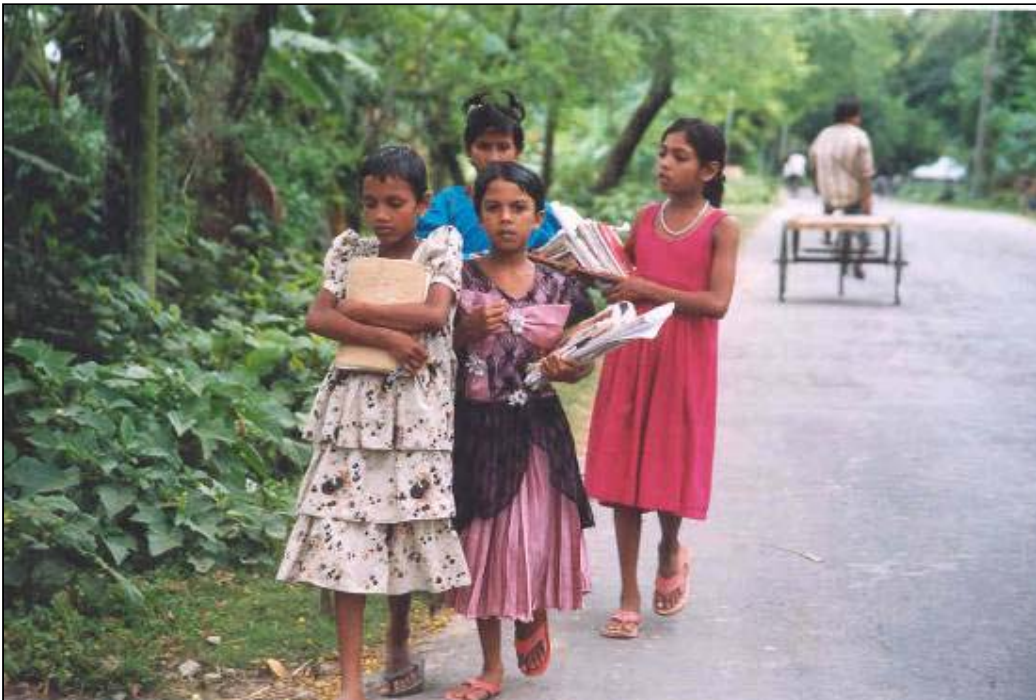
Experience has shown that targeting is very expensive and it creates opportunities for 'leakages' and corruption. So, some of

Global concerns for UNGEI:

- ECD remains a neglected area
- Progression through primary grades and school completion (retention, repetition, drop-out)
- Transition from pre to primary schools, non-formal to formal schools, and from school to work
- Inequalities within country – rural-urban, rich-poor, ethnic groups, social exclusion & discrimination
- Learning needs of young people are less documented
- Adult illiteracy is a global issue
- Poor learning outcomes, teacher shortage, crowded classrooms, low instructional time

the stipend money gets allotted to children who are not so poor. The stipend, in fact, does not benefit the child directly, as the money goes to her mother. And although she is sent to school because of the money, she goes to school hungry. From that perspective provision of midday meals is more relevant for the child than stipend.

- ❖ There is a need to go deeper into the profiles of children to look at the roles that girls play in their families. It may provide the answer as to why girls are not staying in school⁴.
- ❖ Madrassa education is a second option for some of those girls who are dropping out of the formal school. However, it is debatable how girl friendly it is. The chapters followed by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) are not included in their curriculum, which is restricting the learning experience of their girl students.
- ❖ There is a huge need for non formal education as well as continuing education. A proper literacy and continuing education programme, the foundation of life long learning, with enforceable quality criteria and performance standards is very much needed.
- ❖ Lack of social security for girls in rural areas is a big concern. Girls going to school located far away or remote areas are often victims of eve teasing and other forms of violation.



⁴ As a positive step forward in helping drop outs, the Bangladesh Open University has started an officially certified junior secondary education course. This programme also includes vocational training in which drop outs from class five can enroll themselves and in their own pace complete the course.

The potentials of working with UNGEI



For the stakeholders participating in the Consultation Meeting, the starting point for conceiving the role of the UNGEI Bangladesh Partnership was that it would bring core strengths and wear a gender and inclusion hat at:

- ❖ Policy level – to review and influence national processes such as PRSPs, SWApS, health, youth and industrial and employment policies;
- ❖ Community level – to support school and communities to deliver messages and make things happen;
- ❖ Private sector level – to assume Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR);
- ❖ Work with journalists;
- ❖ Work with young people; and
- ❖ Research, both qualitative and quantitative.

It would also provide opportunity for advocacy and change by

- ❖ finding a niche and building on what exists;
- ❖ advocating for further dis-aggregation of data to understand intra-country variations by ethnicity, language, specific occupation groups (tea estates), remoteness, and so on;
- ❖ being an institutional national mechanism to track gender issues in a cross-sectoral manner (e.g., a network to contribute to MDG 3); and by
- ❖ providing coordination among national policies.

The overall focus would be on bringing Bangladesh from parity to equality for girls and boys in education and life opportunities.

Young Champions' voices in UNGEI

There is already a cadre of Young Champions working for the cause of girls' education in Bangladesh. Young Champions is an innovative concept adopted by UNGEI as a way of working with young people at the global, regional and country levels to help achieve MDG and Education for All (EFA) goals for girls' education. The first Young

Champions for Education Training programme organized in Kathmandu by the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA) in May 2007, brought together over 30 committed young people from South Asia who are now actively working to champion the cause of girls' education. The event focused on developing the media and communication skills of the Young Champions as well as sharing and learning from presentations by various groups on activities that are taking place in countries throughout South Asia.

The concept of Young Champions is taken forward in different ways in different countries, e.g. through artists' workshops in Bhutan, Boy Scouts in Pakistan, community radio stations in Afghanistan and peer educators and paralegal women's groups in Nepal. In Bangladesh the Young Champions are young journalists.

The Bangladeshi Young Champions have started a campaign to promote girls' education. There is also an online community of the Young Champions of the seven countries. The Bangladeshi Young Champions say, "We share what we are doing in each of our countries to change the society, change the viewpoints of people. We draw ideas from each other to adapt to our own work."



The Young Champions look upon as a constraint the general opinion that compared to the neighbouring countries, the status of girls' education in Bangladesh is good in terms of enrolment and attendance. They, however, believe that much more needs to be done for girls' education.

The Young Champions have so far:

- ❖ Produced a 15-minute documentary video called 'Girl Stars' that was aired on different TV channels of Bangladesh. The video is intended for use in gender training sessions by the government and NGOs and to serve as an encouragement for girls for changing their lives for the better.
- ❖ Done reporting for daily newspapers. So far they have had 14 reports published, and are working with 670 young journalists

When asked how they felt about producing the video 'Girl Stars', Young Champion Tariq replied, "I edited the video, and I don't know if there is anyone of my age in the media world in Bangladesh to have work on something like this. I am a Young Champion, but I also feel like a lucky young person to have had this opportunity! This has been a special experience for all of us because we worked on a video that is about us. The Meena cartoon has contributed much in advancing girls' education in our country, so we wanted to portray the girl stars as real life Meena characters of our society."

from 64 districts who are also reporting and advocating for child rights issues.

- ❖ Published a quarterly newsletter called 'Noise and News' which focuses mainly on child rights issues, girls' education, drug abuse, peer pressure for smoking, HIV/AIDS etc. Other South Asian Young Champions also contribute articles to the newsletter.
- ❖ Held a day-long orientation workshop for 26 adolescents to disseminate what the Young Champions had learned from the ToT in Kathmandu and to identify issues children are facing that act as barriers to their education.
- ❖ Participated at the World Fit for Children (WFFC) Forum at UN General Assembly. Young Champion Ruiya Akhter participated at the Forum with the objective to ensure that voices of the youth are heard by policy makers.
- ❖ Opened 5 slum schools in which 60 children have enrolled so far. The Young Champions are working on this with the civil society and some NGOs.
- ❖ Attended the South Asia UNGEI Regional Training Programme that had the objective of developing a cadre of Young Champions as advocates and spokespersons for young people who will work with their peers to advocate for child rights.

Best practices in UNGEI

Some best practices in girls' education from three different countries were shared at the Consultation Meeting to consider for replication or adaptation to the Bangladesh context. These are some summarized points from the presentations:

Afghanistan:

Education is a constitutional right in Afghanistan. Girls' education is high on their agenda, and is not just a political commitment on paper but in practice. The workplan of the Afghanistan Girls' Education Initiative (AGEI) flows from the National Strategic Plan for Education. AGEI has a mix of diverse members and is chaired by the Ministry of Education (MoE) with UNICEF as co-chair. It also has 8 small working groups. It supports the government to implement and move forward with the National Strategic Plan and gives input to government policies.

In terms of achievements in girls' education:

- ❖ More than three thousand schools were rehabilitated or newly built during the past years and 1000 more are in the plan for 2007-08;
- ❖ Program performance data show that of the students enrolled in 2007, 45% are girls and that 35% of teachers in provinces (at that time this was 12 out of a total of 34 provinces) are women (in 2003, it was 14%);



- ❖ A new curricula for secondary schools (for the first time in decades) has been developed and textbook development is in progress;
- ❖ Fourteen new Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) have been established;
- ❖ Enrollment of students in TTC has increased up to 42%;
- ❖ Teaching facilities and female dormitories for TTCs have been constructed;
- ❖ Decentralization of teacher recruitment is part of the structural reform that is fully designed and in the loop for implementation;
- ❖ With regard to gender equality, a cross cutting and overarching objective of MoE is the promotion of girls' education and increasing the numbers of trained female teachers and principals. Accordingly, priority is given to constructing schools for girls; social mobilization is done to motivate and encourage local communities to send girls to school; women representation is ensured in school management committees and parent teacher associations; and recruitment and training of women teachers is emphasized with an incentive scheme.

In terms of achievements of AGEI:

- ❖ MoE has taken ownership of the Partnership;
- ❖ MoE has accepted the Situation Analysis conducted by AGEI as the national situation analysis;
- ❖ The ECD policy has been drafted;
- ❖ A national Girls' Education Communication Strategy is being developed.

Cambodia:

While Afghanistan has a National Strategic Plan for Education, Cambodia has a Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Plan. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) is the engine for gender mainstreaming. There is an inter-ministerial Gender Working Group under the EFA Secretariat related to the Goal 5 of EFA and a Steering Committee on Gender and Girls' Education in MoEYS.

In terms of achievements of MoEYS:

- ❖ The Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Plan has been updated for the period 2006-10 with two main objectives, 1) to increase women's participation in the management and delivery of educational services at all levels; and 2) to create positive social attitudes towards girls' education and gender equality;
- ❖ Quality standards and indicators for gender mainstreaming in education have been drafted to include both quantitative and quality indicators;
- ❖ The strategic plan has been disseminated to central, provincial, and district education staff, both men and women through regional gender sensitization workshop;

- ❖ Gender based education leadership training has been conducted for female vice school directors and well performing upper secondary school teachers to prepare them to take school director positions in the future;
- ❖ The 6 core dimensions of the child friendly school⁵ has been implemented at school level to promote gender awareness and provide equitable educational opportunities for girls and boys through promotion of girl representation in student councils and school support committees.
- ❖ Gender assessment has been conducted in 24 provinces using quality standards and indicators for gender mainstreaming in education;
- ❖ The EFA mid decade assessment report has been produced with a chapter focusing on analysis of gender and equality.

Uganda:

The Uganda Partnership has devolved to the district level and involves the private sector as well. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) Task Force provides strategic guidance at the national level and facilitates implementation of the UNGEI vision. The Task Force has a strong mix of members with MoES as chair, the Federation of African Women Educationalists of Uganda (FAWEU) as co-chair, and UNICEF as convener.

Some of the achievements and successes are:

- ❖ 164 camp/community education committees in the eastern and northern regions;
- ❖ Planned roll-out in Western Uganda;
- ❖ Commitment by key ministries: MoES and Ministry of Gender to place emphasis on girls' education and young people's participation;
- ❖ Large number of partners involved;
- ❖ Roll-out to the district and community levels;
- ❖ Child Friendly Schools widely implemented.



Participation of the FAWEU is one of the strong points of the Uganda Partnership. It is composed of former ministers, as well as professors, economists, and people who have worked in international situations whose opinions are respected. They have a strong research base and so their advocacy is actual evidence based. They are adding a lot of value in the education context of Africa by doing advocacy to bring about policy change, as well as providing training, giving grants, sponsoring projects and doing fund raising.

⁵ A child friendly school looks into all aspects of a school from the perspective of the child. It has two components, the content component and the process component. Children, teachers and the community come together in a process to adapt and create their own child friendly criteria for the school.

The following points were considered worth replicating in Bangladesh



From Afghanistan:

- ❖ Education as a constitutional right
- ❖ A National Education Strategic Plan for Girls' Education
- ❖ Free education up to B.A. level
- ❖ Upgrading of curriculum

From Cambodia:

- ❖ Inter-ministerial Gender Mainstreaming Working Group under EFA Secretariat
- ❖ Child friendly schools

From Uganda:

- ❖ Girls' Education Partnership at district and local levels
- ❖ Commitment from prominent women

General:

- ❖ National consensus on education policy
- ❖ Multi-sectoral/Multi-level Partnership Forum to support girls' education
- ❖ Female friendly environment
- ❖ Young Champions at national level

Action Ideas for moving forward



In considering a ToR or action ideas for the Bangladesh Partnership, three main dimensions of gender equality in girls' education stand out. The first one is education as an inherent and constitutional right. The second dimension has to do with access to resources and

opportunities – resources such as land and infrastructure, and opportunities such as employment and income and political participation. There is also the issue of security – freedom from violence, safety within the school and the family, and safety to and from school. The third dimension involves looking at school as a continuous process starting from early childhood and onwards, and this needs a multi-sectoral approach to link the steps that children, including girls, take from education to work.

MDG 3 has two types of indicators: one is numeric, which is about parity in education at primary, secondary and higher levels. Bangladesh has already achieved gender parity at primary and secondary levels, but not at higher secondary and tertiary levels. The other part of MDG 3 is not related to numbers, but to women's empowerment. This calls for looking at the whole spectrum of empowerment of women or at least at gender equality.

Turning the focus on equality raises questions such as, do girls come out of primary schools with similar kinds of experiences as boys? Or is the society being replicated at school through reproduction of the same social norms and training of girls to behave according to social expectation whether they are educated or not? Is it happening at the secondary level? Is there a need to go beyond numbers in primary and secondary levels, or is it necessary to expand further and look into equality of sexes in the society and revisit the gender roles?

Lack of coordination is also a big issue. There are many different agencies and frameworks for the pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary education systems working in their own different ways. Also in Bangladesh, knowledge is not shared. A culture of holding back information is strongly prevalent in the society, which often promotes corruption. People are not aware of the opportunities that are available and therefore do not claim what is rightfully theirs, such as availability of stipends or other facilities.

When the stakeholders put together a set of action ideas to take the Bangladesh Partnership forward, they considered all these issues and concerns along with the overarching question as to how UNGEI can bring added value to all the existing initiatives.

They made their presentations of three priority action ideas from six different groups – government, NGOs, academia, international organizations, UNICEF, and Young Champions.

Action Ideas

The government group:



- ❖ Positioning Bangladesh Girls' Education Initiative in MDG3 – for gender equality and empowerment of women.
- ❖ Networking with GO/NGO and international agencies – for coordination among all sectors, including at policy and ministerial levels and at advocacy, implementation and monitoring & evaluation as well as information/knowledge sharing.
- ❖ Multi-sectoral approach – for involvement in the Partnership of
 - the government (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Food and Disaster, Department of Public Health Engineering, Local Government Division, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs)
 - international agencies and NGOs (UNESCO, UNICEF, WFP and other relevant organizations)

The NGO group:



- ❖ Ensure the constitutional right to education through implementing girl friendly curriculum and environment. Girl friendly curriculum refers here to one equitable and uniform curriculum;

- ❖ Add value in terms of:
 - establishing linkages between education and women's rights movements/platforms for mainstreaming girls' education issues
 - involving private and other professional sectors/groups to mainstream girls' education issues/initiatives
 - advocating with other sectors like health, nutrition, disaster, security, information and communication to prioritize girls' education
 - creating a bargaining and negotiating platform with the other actors
 - ensuring participation of girls at all level of policy making, implementation and social audit (to see the overall impact on the society as whole)
 - minimizing duplication and promoting collective initiatives of GO-NGO and civil societies
- ❖ Help move forward together and act now

The Academia group:



They took a multi-sectoral approach in their recommendations:

Education

- ❖ Update curriculum to make it equitable and uniform
- ❖ Introduce quality standards and indicators for schools and colleges
- ❖ Formulate a Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Plan
- ❖ Provide gender based education leadership training so that women can participate in carrying out strategic plans in gender mainstreaming

Protection

- ❖ Social mobilization (also against eve teasing) for all members of the society, religious leaders, and at family level
- ❖ Safe school and safe community contracts signed between the school and community to give protection to the girls coming to school and to support women teachers

Health and Nutrition

- ❖ School feeding programmes to look after the child's health
- ❖ School health programmes

Water and sanitation

- ❖ Safe drinking water
- ❖ Proper sanitation facilities

Vocational training

- ❖ Vocational training at secondary schools
- ❖ Bank loans for women entrepreneurs for self-employment
- ❖ Women friendly working environment
- ❖ Childcare facilities

Others

- ❖ strong partnership with NGOs and other agencies

Necessary for ensuring all these possibilities are government social and political commitment and inter-ministerial planning, implementation and coordination.

International organization group:



- ❖ Form a National Platform for girls' education in Bangladesh
- ❖ Conduct situation analysis of girls' education in Bangladesh
- ❖ Develop basic standards and set indicators for girls' education (for disaggregated data and a common source of data)
- ❖ Set up inter-ministerial working group for girls' education
- ❖ Set up private/NGO/CBO partnership
- ❖ Set up database system / information bank on girls' education. The existing databases are not very reliable. An updated database could be included in the existing database system of the Department of Primary Education
- ❖ Do advocacy on gender equality at all levels, particularly at the grassroots

- ❖ Develop functional communication strategy for girls' education
- ❖ Ensure access for girls to skills training
- ❖ Expand Young Champion activities to every level
- ❖ Get commitment from prominent women leaders and professionals
- ❖ Establish more infrastructure to retain girls at school

UNICEF:



- ❖ Expand, energize and institutionalize the Bangladesh Girls' Education Initiative network;
- ❖ Do situation analysis at national level through studies;
- ❖ Do gender auditing to look into relevance of curriculum at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Also, auditing of all national strategies, national plans of action, PEDPII gender strategies action plans, from the point of view of girls' education and gender equality;
- ❖ Develop life skill based curriculum;
- ❖ Provide school based health support including midday meal. For this community support, social services and a lot of advocacy work are needed;
- ❖ Promote comprehensive national education policy focusing on girls, adolescent issues including protection, and life skills based education;
- ❖ Ensure gender parity in enrolment, administration and management for women. For the secondary education system there are only 10% women teachers at the management level, and at the top level women representation is very little;
- ❖ Ensure leadership development in education;
- ❖ Ensure gender sensitive water and sanitation facilities.

Young Champions' group:



❖ **Advocacy:**

- at parental level
- translate and contextualize the training manual being developed by ROSA
- share experience and knowledge with peer groups

❖ **Media:**

- establish network in 64 districts
- Report writing in newspapers that will accentuate the female education from a different point of view
- Develop media materials
- become involved with interactive theatre

❖ **Spread leadership:**

- at school level
- at college level
- at non-formal level (including drop outs)





Potentials and Challenges in institutionalizing Bangladesh Girls' Education Initiative in Bangladesh

The following potentials and challenges were identified by the stakeholders at the Consultation Meeting:

Potentials:

- ❖ Positive attitude towards girls' education, including of relevant ministries
- ❖ Girls are already a priority area of work for the government, NGOs and other development actors
- ❖ Inclusion of the government sector
- ❖ Enough scope for the Partnership to act as key network for action areas from pre-school to tertiary levels
- ❖ Enough scope to build on the on going activities (Young Champions, Kishori Abhijan, Monitoring through adolescent groups and Student Brigades)
- ❖ There is an existing network all the way to the grassroots
- ❖ There is social acceptance of education for both girls and boys
- ❖ There is availability of funding from different sources
- ❖ Resources
- ❖ The initiative has a mission with a vision

Challenges

- ❖ Social insecurity
- ❖ Curriculum diversity
- ❖ Growing fundamentalism
- ❖ Lack of coordination among government, NGOs, private sector, UN bodies and other development partners
- ❖ Inadequate physical facilities and human resources
- ❖ Fund constraints
- ❖ Skepticism
- ❖ Getting commitment of partners to make the network functional
- ❖ Lack of political will and commitment of government, NGOs and private sector
- ❖ Developing a common information and data source
- ❖ To transform education as a fundamental right to a constitutional right