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Plan UK
Finsgate
5-7 Cranwood Street
London
EC1V 9LH

Tel: +44 (0)20 7608 1311
Fax: +44 (0)20 7253 9989

Web: www.plan-uk.org

Registered Charity no: 276035 - Registered in England no: 1364201



Leading education
and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way
London
WC1H 0AL

Tel: +44 (0)20 7612 6000

Web: www.ioe.ac.uk

Because I am a Girl: Delivering Learning for Life



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Elaine Unterhalter & Charlotte Nussey
Institute of Education, University of London, March 2013

About the authors

Elaine Unterhalter is Professor of Education and International Development at the Institute of Education, University of London.

Charlotte Nussey is a doctoral student at the Institute of Education, University of London working on Gender, Violence and Education.

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the Plan: to work with the world's poorest children so they can move themselves from a life of poverty to a future with opportunity

1. Introduction

The specific rights of adolescent girls are overlooked in much international development policy and practice. Policy and advocacy documents sometimes portray teenage girls as a 'secret weapon' to take forward initiatives for reducing population size, enhancing sustainability, developing economic growth, and improving awareness of HIV. These assertions, while undoubtedly important, place adolescent girls as a solution to global problems and neglect attending to their particular rights. Such arguments rest heavily on instrumental approaches to educating girls and underplay the intrinsic importance of schooling to girls themselves. These arguments tend to give only scant attention to the varied contexts in which diverse groups of adolescent girls around the world live and how their differing transitions to adulthood evolve.

This paper addresses the policy gap in which the importance of adolescent girls' education is stressed without adequate focus on a contextualised demand for rights. The period of adolescence, particularly for young women, is one in which horizons are shaped, and opportunities can be opened up or closed down. If teenage girls are positioned as a key target for development, without appropriate discussions with them or reflections on their rights and the benefits of education, there is a danger that policy makers will overlook the realities and complexities of their lives, the many facets of inequality in power relationships and the legacy of historical disadvantages. However, opening up the space for discussion with adolescent girls in order that the specificities of their relationships with families, communities, schools and societies become the focus of policies means that we can start to enable girls living in a wide range of contexts to claim rights, expand capabilities and lead lives which they value.

The aim of this policy paper is to highlight the significance of adolescent girls and their education for key discussions taking place in 2013, notably the framing of the *Education First* Initiative, debates about the Post-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework and the review of the 20 years since the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action on Women.

The paper has a particular stress on:

- adolescent girls' access to and completion of education;
- the importance of quality and gender equality in school;
- aspects of citizenship and schooling; and
- the financial gap in resources directed to the education of this important but overlooked group.

It builds on findings from Plan International's *State of the World's Girls, 2012* report, and the Technical Roundtable discussion organised by Plan UK on 11 October 2012, the first globally recognised International Day of the Girl Child. It makes an advocacy statement for nine years of high quality education for all children, with particular resources directed to the needs of adolescent girls. This paper stresses the importance of schooling and a wide range of learning outcomes, within and beyond the walls of the school.

The invisibility of adolescent girls' rights in global and national goals, targets and indicators

Within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), there are no special goals or targets dealing with adolescent girls. The education goal (MDG2) has a target for all children to complete primary schooling. There is no goal or target for secondary schooling, in relation to any forms of quality education. While one of the indicators associated with MDG2 relates to literacy for girls aged 15-24, there is no target indicating how the literacy levels for this group might be enhanced.

The gender goal (MDG3) has a target and an indicator to eliminate gender disparity in primary, secondary and tertiary education. But gender parity is a question of the ratio of girls to boys, and requires only that numbers enrolled or attending are equal, even if these numbers in fact represent a very low proportion of the overall school-age population. The reality is that improvements in national gender parity enrolment or progression ratios often reflect increases in the numbers of girls from middle and high income quintiles attending schools, overlooking the poorest and most marginalised, who remain invisible in many aggregated statistics. These girls may be enrolled, but often attend only irregularly, learn little, and fail to complete their education. Gender parity measures aspects of schooling, such as enrolment, attendance, or progression, which express concern with rights to education. However, a wider measure of gender equality in education and through schooling is also needed to express fully the ways in which schooling for girls does or does not secure full political, economic and social rights (Unterhalter, 2011).

Other indicators for the target of the third Millennium Development Goal have rather limited relevance for adolescent girls. They focus on women's wage employment in the non-agricultural sector, and women's presence in national parliaments. However, only a fraction of adolescent girls worldwide employed are in formal wage employment outside the agricultural sector, given the size of this informal sector and agricultural production (ILO 2005). Further, young women's presence in national parliaments is minimal in just about every country in the world, despite the huge potential of engaging adolescent girls in discussions about their own futures.

These MDG indicators do not speak to the particular economic, political and social challenges around gender inequality for girls in this age band. A target for reducing the levels of violence against women and girls, both in and out of school, is starkly absent from these indicators despite extensive research on the significance of the global phenomenon of violence against women having very specific effects on women claiming rights (Plan, 2012a). While one of the indicators under MDG5 notes a concern with adolescent birth rates, none of the other health MDGs single out this age group. Thus the MDG indicators and targets ignore many of the rights owed to adolescent girls with regard to education, health, and gender equality.

National policies are also ambiguous in relation to the protection of adolescent girls' rights. An extensive review of national legislation in 155 countries on when young women may marry, enter into contracts, leave school, or be punished for crimes, shows huge variation across social sectors within particular countries (RTE, 2011). Thus many countries' legislation does not routinely protect adolescent girls from exposure too early to health risks, marriage and pregnancy, or disrupted schooling.

We need to know a great deal more with regard to varied national and local settings about the reasons for differences in access to school, experiences of education and what some of the outcomes are. This is a key component of trying to change many of the inequalities and violations of rights girls currently experience and improve the legislative framework and the translation of policy into practice. Much valuable information on this is assembled in the *State of the World's Girls, 2012* report.



Photo: Gina Nemirofsky / 10x10act.org

2. The context and issues

Huge strides have been made by the global community and national governments in support of girls' rights to education since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action agreed at the Fourth World conference on women in 1995, and the Dakar Programme of Action on Education for All (EfA) and the MDGs adopted in 2000. Particular advances have been made in enhancing access to primary school.

While these gains are to be celebrated, access to secondary schooling remains an issue, particularly for girls. Worldwide in 2010, 71 million adolescents were out of school, of whom 48 per cent were girls (UNESCO, 2012: 371), but this accounts only for children not taking up places provided for them, not those where secondary provision is not an option.

Although there were 25 per cent more children in secondary school in 2012 than in 1999, in many countries only a small proportion access this level of education. In Sub-Saharan Africa in 2010 only 40 per cent of the age group were enrolled in secondary education (UNESCO, 2012: 4). Only 43 per cent of girls in Africa were enrolled in lower secondary school, and only 50 per cent of girls in all low income countries (UNESCO, 2012: 370). Wealth disparities impact heavily on access to school. In the poorest 20 per cent of households in the world, only 64 per cent of all school-aged children enrol in school, compared to 90 per cent of children in the richest 20 per cent of households (Plan, 2012: 39). In Nigeria, the country with the largest number of children out of school, 62 per cent of children from the poorest quintile did not attend school in 2010, compared with just 2 per cent from the richest quintile (GMR 2012: 70). Girls living in rural areas are much less likely than those in urban areas to enrol in school - in Pakistan, a rural girl from one of the poorest homes is 16 times more likely to be out of school than a rich urban boy (Plan, 2012: 39).

Such wealth disparities are often compounded by forms of ethnic or racial discrimination - in Vietnam, nine out of ten Hmong are in the bottom 20 per cent of the national distribution for years in school (UNESCO, 2010: 154). People with disabilities are also often invisible from education statistics; although it has been estimated that about 35 per cent of all out of school children are disabled, official statistics are often unreliable, systematically under-reported or simply unavailable (UNESCO, 2006; UNESCO, 2010: 181-3). Thus, while much has been achieved in relation to access to primary education, location, and economic and social inequalities continue to impact on an adolescent girl's ability to access primary and thus progress to post-primary education.

Rights to education are not just about enrolment. Ensuring full participation requires that girls stay in school beyond the first day when a register is taken. Data suggests that many girls are pushed out of school by factors such as poverty, costs of schooling, poor attainment, child marriage, pregnancy, the distance to school, experiences of violence, disabilities and health factors including malnutrition. Gender inequality is a key dimension of this and operates to connect public and private sites of discrimination, in households, schools, and health provision with relationships in one site often reproducing, rather than challenging, those in the other. Ensuring girls access, participate, learn and remain in school requires interventions that go beyond enrolment. Assessing these and planning adequately for this requires accurate data, including well organised administrative data.

In addition planners need to develop a range of indicators that can express and track the multidimensionality of inequality and the effectiveness of strategies for change.

Just as access to school varies hugely according to whether or not you are a boy or girl, rich or poor, urban or rural, have a disability or not, or are born into a dominant or discriminated-against community, so too does the quality of education. Many of the conventional indicators of aspects of quality do not take account of gender, and therefore fail to capture the full extent of what a quality education means for adolescent girls. For example, while the appointment of sufficient numbers of teachers is acknowledged as an important aspect of quality, the presence of well-paid and well-supported female teachers boosted female students' learning in Botswana (Plan, 2012b: 76). Research in Botswana and Ghana found that if teachers lacked knowledge of gender issues, boys were likely to dominate both the physical and verbal space in classrooms, silencing or ridiculing girls when they attempted to participate in the lesson (Plan, 2012b: 89). A quality education is thus not just about numeracy, literacy or even life skills. By ensuring that gender equality is central to our analysis of quality we can pay attention to broader aspects of the schooling environment, such as gender norms transmitted in classrooms, the form and content of curricula dealing with gender, reproductive rights and gender roles, and the ways in which schools tackle gender-based violence. The extent to which teaching and classroom interaction help construct processes for girls to learn how to participate in discussions about rights inside and outside school and how boys learn to look critically at constructions of masculinity should be a central part of discussion of quality.

The ways in which education might open up - or conversely close down - opportunities for girls and women is complex and links with conditions in schools and societies. Research has shown, for example, that as women gain four additional years of education, fertility rates drop by one birth (Plan, 2012b: 98). In Mali, women with secondary education have, on average, three children, while those with no education have an average of seven (Plan, 2012b: 104). Women who have attended secondary education or higher are also less likely to think that violence is justified - in Ethiopia, 68 per cent of women with no education thought that violence was justified when a woman has burnt food, compared to 24 per cent of women with secondary education or higher, while women with more education are more likely to say that their opinion has weight in household decisions (Plan, 2012b: 102).

But education is only part of the picture. Women are still more likely to earn less than men - in the USA even in the highest-paid jobs, women doing the same job as men earned up to 25 per cent less - and in many developing countries the positive relationship between years of education and girls' access to more and better-paid work has not held up. In Kerala, for example, which has the highest rates of girls' education amongst all the Indian states, girls' unemployment and labour force participation is much worse than boys (Plan, 2012b: 107). The role education can play in helping young women gain access to work or political participation must be viewed alongside other policies on enhancing gender equality through, for example, employment law, childcare provision, enhancing sustainable livelihoods, and supporting female representation in culture, politics and all positions of power. Rights through education are realised both in educational settings and wider social contexts; it is important for policy and advocacy outcomes to create an enabling environment to challenge and change gender norms and stereotypes which discriminate and perpetuate current inequalities.

The analysis in *State of the World's Girls, 2012* report has led Plan to make three main recommendations. Firstly, that we should continue to build on the successes since the Beijing Platform of Action was adopted in 1995 by continuing to focus on education in global and national policy making. We should build beyond demands for primary schooling to at least nine years of education with a focus on ensuring equity, gender equality, and quality which goes beyond the official curriculum to address equitable forms of participation and values transmitted through schooling.

Secondly, we need to ensure that gender is central to the ways in which governments review education sector plans. Plan recommends a 'girl- and boy-friendly scorecard' for assessing schools, which asks government to budget to ensure accessibility for all girls, accountability to local communities, and ensure that schools, their teachers and curricula are safe and supportive, and free from stereotyping and gender-based discrimination.

Finally, Plan argues that adequate funding mechanisms need to be in place to support nine years of quality education that gives a central position to gender equality, both within and outside the school.

These recommendations point to the need to give much more concerted research and policy attention to three particular issues:

- Financing flows for gender equality and adolescent girls' rights in school
- The quality of schooling and gender equality
- Situating adolescent girls' rights to education in emerging global policy frameworks.



Photo: Plan

3. Financial flows

There has been a considerable increase in national and international expenditure on education since the Beijing Declaration of 1995, renewed by the EfA and Millennium Development Goals, but we have only limited information on the extent to which this spend has given any particular emphasis to gender equality and adolescent girls' right to education. Data assembled by UNESCO Institute of Statistics, reviewing public expenditure on education per student by school phase, show that in richer countries there is a similar level of expenditure at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, although more than half of young adults do not participate in post-secondary education (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2011, 28-45).

However, in middle and low income countries, much more money is spent per pupil on the education of those in tertiary education, which only a small proportion of young women attend (in many African countries just 5 per cent of the age group; in India around 13 per cent have access), compared to primary and secondary schooling. Thus, for example in India in 2008 US\$198 was spent on the education of each child in primary school, US\$361 on a child in secondary school, and US\$1,228 on a young person in tertiary level education. In Ethiopia the amounts were US\$88 (primary), US\$63 (secondary), and US\$4,531 (tertiary) (UNESCO, 2010: 208-211). So the levels of education most adolescent girls receive – primary and secondary – are those with the lowest per pupil spend in low and middle income countries.

Tracking multilateral and bilateral commitments to education show an enormous growth since 1995, the largest component of this, development assistance to primary education; either for specific projects on teacher development or district planning or direct to governments through budget support. This peaked in 2009-10 at US\$5,789 million, when it comprised 43 per cent of the total aid to education (US\$13,468million) (UNESCO, 2012: 147). This represented a 97 per cent increase since 2002, and a 92 per cent increase in aid to low and middle income countries. However, it is not known how much of this expenditure went to girls' education or gender equality projects. In addition, it is a matter of concern that aid to secondary education has been much more modest. In 2002 the annual average of Overseas Development Aid (ODA) was US\$463 million and in 2010 this had increased to US\$1,279 million, 9 per cent of total aid expenditure (UNESCO, 2012: 405). Only US\$530 million of this was allocated to lower middle income countries and US\$363 million allocated to low income countries, with a sizeable amount (US\$282 million) allocated to upper middle income countries. These amounts, coupled with more limited national spending on junior secondary education mean that expansion at this level, with the specific needs of adolescent girls in mind, presents an enormous challenge.

Analysis of donor assistance to gender equality and women's rights programmes concerned with enhanced participation, advocacy and service provision in education, health and other social sectors since 1997 shows that this comprised less than 4 per cent of all aid flows to education in 1997-8 and had increased to only 5 per cent in 2009-10 (Peppin Vaughan, 2012). There has been no systematic gender budgeting analysis of donor assistance specifically with regard to education projects.

Peppin Vaughan's analysis of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistant Committee's (DAC) data indicates the largest proportion of bilateral support to gender or girls' education appear to be directed to three particular conflict affected countries – Afghanistan, Iraq and Democratic Republic of Congo – partly in keeping with some of the significant increases associated with the security agenda in Iraq and Afghanistan, but in no way meeting the extent of need in these countries (Novelli, 2010; UNESCO, 2012: 61-3). What this analysis suggests is that to date ODA in education has only given emphasis to gender equality and girls' rights in particular contexts. A much more concerted review of aid spending, through a 'gender lens' is in order, with a particular focus on the specific needs of adolescent girls in general, and secondary education in particular.

Although there are a number of interventions targeted at girls in this age bracket (see Lloyd, 2012 for a review), not all of these have been evaluated, and there is no overall assessment of total spend on these programmes as a proportion of total expenditures in education. At present it appears we know too little about whether educational expenditure is being adequately targeted at gender equality and girls' rights programmes.

Clearly, much more work needs to be done to undertake forms of gender budgeting with regard to education expenditure by governments, multilateral and bilateral donors. Because adolescent girls are central to many aspects of development, adequate resources need to be directed to supporting them to access school, remain there, and achieve well. Experiences with gender budgeting indicate a dedicated annual spend by each government department (5 per cent was tried in the Philippines) can begin to address entrenched and often taken-for-granted gender inequalities (UN Women, 2012). It is clear that in bilateral and multilateral ODA programmes nothing like this is being spent on girls' education and gender equality. More research needs to be done at national level to investigate where money is being spent, what the reasons for particular budget lines are and what an appropriate level of gender-responsive ODA might look like.

4. Quality

There is currently wide agreement amongst a range of policy makers, practitioners and researchers that too many children are in school but not learning. This has generated considerable debate around defining what a 'quality' education is. One definition put forward by a team working on reviewing learning metrics talks about quality in terms of learning, teaching, leadership and connection across services (Centre for Universal Education, Brookings, 2011). An alternative definition, associated with the work of Leon Tikly and Angeline Barrett, sees quality in terms of inclusion, relevance and participation (Tikly and Barrett 2011). Neither of these two definitions, however, takes what is specific about girls' education or gender equality, and gives it any prominent place.

Gender equality in fact cuts through all questions of quality, whether we are thinking in terms of teaching and learning, or inclusion and relevance. Within *State of the World's Girls, 2012*, and a number of other policy papers which focus on quality (e.g. World Bank, Centre for Universal Education at Brookings, UNICEF), there is an implicit assumption that we must understand quality as the answer to all the problems associated with children's schooling. Such policies assume that the problems associated with girls' lack of realisation of rights or gender inequality are to be addressed through quality with a stress on learning without fear, child-centred pedagogies, engagement with health, reproductive rights or particular classroom organisation.

But seeing quality as the answer in this way neglects the diversity of problems adolescent girls encounter both inside and outside school in many different contexts. For example, the exclusion of pregnant young women from school is, on one level, a question of inadequate quality to address the special learning of young mothers who may need a period of study at home while caring for a young child. But the question of education for pregnant schoolgirls also needs to address the ways in which young women talk about shame, and are made the object of blame and evasion with regard to how public and private sites of gender inequality connect. Policy and practice associated with young mothers' schooling generally fails to examine the relational dynamics of gender (Unterhalter, 2013). Acknowledging this suggests the importance of also understanding quality as the terrain on which more engaged gender equality work is to be done that goes below the surface of policy rhetoric and substantially shifts resources and attitudes.

In engaging with the detail of quality, we need to centralise a concern with gender and other equalities in planning and delivering for how adolescent girls, regardless of their background, are treated in schools, what they learn, how this is taught, how schools are organised and how they connect with initiatives for health work, citizenship and challenges to forms of violence. We need to constantly go back to tackling gender inequalities and how they manifest themselves in material form - that is in expenditures, training programme and curricula - and also non material forms - that is attitudes, expectations and exclusions.

Making schools safe, accessible and relevant, as the *State of the World's Girls, 2012* report advocates with monitoring achieved through a school report card is a first step. However, we need to think what the next step beyond that is. Attached to those report cards need to be money, substantial investments in improving provision, information, reflection and accountability. The report card is a lever; it cannot 'make quality' on its own. This requires support work on many other areas including teacher employment conditions, pay, promotion, and a dedicated architecture to support quality.

Government sector plans and many organisations are notorious for adding gender into the top line of the aims in policy documents and then doing nothing about it. A working understanding of quality which pays close attention to gender equality raises the important question of what appropriate indicators might be used to measure this more substantial notion of quality. We need to look not just at how many teachers are trained, but at how many have been through training which includes a gender component and how they engage with putting this training into practice. We need to look at the numbers of female teachers in middle and senior management positions, and in subjects such as Mathematics and Science. Some of the lessons learned regarding multi-dimensional measurement of poverty and women's empowerment (OPHI, 2012) may be particularly useful to adapt to thinking about metrics for gender equality and quality education. Metrics, such as the OECD SIGI (Social Institutions and Gender Index), could be reviewed to include education fields. Placing a gender inequality penalty on measurements for aspects of education could also be considered. The composite indices used by Action Aid's TEGINT (Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria and Tanzania) (Unterhalter and Heslop, 2012), could be reviewed for use in other contexts.

To do the heavy lifting of taking gender equality seriously in relation to plans for quality entails curriculum review, teacher training, approaches to tackling violence, and building understanding which places gender and other equalities at the centre. A supporting environment needs to be built, drawing in those who have direct and indirect influence over the success of initiatives promoting gender equality, including parents and community leaders, school management committees and political voices. Such work all needs substantial investments of money, time, information analysis and skill, but these are investments worth making to improve the efficiency of resources already allocated and to enhance equalities in provision.



5. Global policy frameworks

In 2013 three discussions about global focus and collaboration are of particular significance for repositioning commitments with regard to adolescent girls:

- *Education First* with its focus on achieving the MDGs
- Consideration of a successor framework to the MDGs
- Discussion of Beijing plus 25.

Education First launched in September 2012 as a special initiative of the UN Secretary General to give prominence to the contribution of education to achieving the MDGs. *Education First* has three aims:

1. Raise the political profile of education and rally together a broad spectrum of actors
2. Spur a global movement to achieve quality, relevant and inclusive education for all by 2015, with linked gains for the broad development agenda, including the MDGs
3. Generate additional and sufficient funding through sustained advocacy efforts.

It outlines the promise of a universal right to basic education in which neither sex, ethnicity nor geography 'should determine whether a child attends school' (*Education First, 2012: 5*). Like the *State of the World's Girls, 2012* report, it notes the proportion of girls in and out of school, and makes an argument with regard to the connection between girls' levels of schooling, increasing women's earnings, improving their work conditions, delaying pregnancy and their capacity to denounce injustice.

Three priority areas are identified by *Education First*: to put every child in primary school, improve the quality of learning, and improve global citizenship. In the first priority area a unique set of barriers is attributed to girls associated largely with their biology, which places them at risk of child marriage, pregnancy, expectations related to domestic labour, unsafe travel, and a lack of sanitary facilities (*Education First, 2012: 15*).

While these are all important observations, the *Education First* initiative does not go far enough in terms of challenging particular political, economic and social norms which assume girls are inferior and not worth educating, are less capable than boys of learning, and must undertake a higher share of domestic labour. There is no focus or discussion of gender in the sections of the project that deal with educational quality or citizenship. The initiative thus appears to miss a key opportunity to connect together gender inequalities in access to schooling, with the ways in which schools might reproduce these inequalities unless clearly identified and changed. It also could powerfully locate gender equality as an important value for teachers to support, and learn to teach, initiatives that go beyond simple training.

Education First does not single out a particular contribution for adolescent girls. However, if girls in this age group from a wide range of contexts are to realise their potential and their contribution to development, initiatives like *Education First* need to note particular aspects of their rights. The *Education First* priority to put every child in school does not indicate what level of provision this entails. However, to fully support girls to stay in school through early adolescence, at least nine years of schooling is necessary. This will ensure acquiring adequate amounts of knowledge and understanding to broaden horizons and raise questions about political, social, cultural and economic arrangements in a locale.

Nine years of school means that adolescent girls will still be in education at the moment when their domestic and reproductive roles come into sharp focus. Instead of experiencing these moments of transition solely within a household or a community group, they can have access to additional knowledge and networks of support, be these with regard to health, decisions about age of marriage, reproductive rights or continuing schooling. A survey of 924 girls in the final year of primary and year 3 of junior secondary schools in Tanzania and Nigeria for the TEGINT (Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria and Tanzania) project, for example, found that a composite empowerment index, which measured views on gender equality, knowledge and attitudes to HIV and confidence in challenging gender-based violence, was higher, with a statistically significant correlation, for girls in junior secondary compared to primary school (Unterhalter and Heslop, 2012). So remaining at school for at least three years of junior secondary schooling enhances girls' capacity to understand rights and encourages her confidence to act.

In addition, expansion of the *Education First* consideration of quality learning needs to focus on gender and other equalities. In planning and delivering for how adolescent girls, regardless of their background, are treated in schools, what they learn, how this is taught, how schools are organised and how they connect with initiatives for health, work, and citizenship, we need to constantly return to tackling gender inequalities and how they manifest themselves in material form (expenditures, teacher training programmes, curricula) and non-material forms (attitudes, expectations and exclusions).

A similar centralisation of gender equality is needed with regard to the third priority area identified by *Education First* - fostering global citizenship. *Education First* draws out how citizenship develops particular values and forms of social engagement. However, citizenship, whatever form it takes and how schools might teach it, is not a de-contextualised set of duties, responsibilities or rights. Citizenship is realised in particular historical conditions, marked by gender and other inequalities. Engaging with these inequalities is a key component of learning citizenship and the sections of the *Education First* vision would be strengthened for taking these concerns further.

6. A successor framework to the MDGs

Much attention is currently being given to the successor framework to the MDGs and possible connections with the initiative for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Arguments have been made that the MDGs set the bar too low in terms of targets in particular areas, for example aiming only at universal primary education and gender parity, and that the separation between different policy areas meant that the synergies between them could not be realised. For example, the expansion of schooling and provision of adequate maternal health care required large numbers of adults with education beyond primary level (Waage et al, 2010).

A second critique of the MDGs in practice has noticed how inadequate attention was given to building the professional knowledge in teachers, health workers and government officials to support and work with poor communities. In the absence of this development, these groups have often resorted to practices which blame the poor for their difficulties and fail to adequately engage with the complexities of inequalities and disadvantage (Unterhalter et al, 2012; Unterhalter, 2012).

The implications of *State of the World's Girls, 2012* are that any post-2015 framework should ensure at least for nine years of schooling for all children and that adequate attention should be given to training teachers, health workers and other officials in gender equality and other aspects of inclusive and equitable development. We therefore suggest that the debate on targets and indicators ensures adequate attention is given to professional training developed and rolled out via engagement with gender and other inequalities, and that the indicators selected do not have perverse incentives that might hinder such initiatives.

The discussions of Beijing + 20 have called for gender to be given a prominent place in any post-2015 MDG settlement. A number of commentators have called for gender to be featured in a separate goal and as component of each particular goal. Women's rights activists continue to highlight the need to ensure the large number of women who remain illiterate are not neglected. Girls currently out of school may well join this group. The focus of the UNESCO global monitoring report 2012 on skills highlighted the many exclusions girls experience in gaining access to the skills required for decent work (UNESCO, 2012). In addition, many vocational education programmes reproduce the gender stereotypes and exclusions of the wider society. The wide vision of the Beijing Declaration on girls' and women's rights still remains to be realised in all phases of schooling.

Recommendations

National governments

- Expand the concept of basic education to include free, compulsory quality education for a minimum of nine years for all children. This should include increased education spending per pupil on primary and secondary education, with a focus on increasing access and completion for the hardest to reach girls and boys
- Place gender equality at the centre of education quality by undertaking a gender review of the Education Sector Plans, including the curriculum, teacher training and approaches to tackling violence. The review should include the participation of girls and boys
- Ensure that girls complete a quality education in a safe and supportive community environment and acquire the skills they need to lead healthy and productive lives. Policies and strategies are needed to address the cultural, social and economic barriers to girls' education, as well as addressing school-based barriers to learning
- Strengthen the collection and organisation of age and sex-disaggregated data, including for children with disabilities, on school enrolment, transition and completion
- Amend national policies to ensure that pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers are able to maintain their education, either in school or during a period of study at home while caring for a young child.

Donors

- Meet the internationally agreed aid target of 0.7 per cent of GNI and increase aid spending on lower-secondary education, with a strong focus on ensuring girls and boys transition to lower-secondary
- Support the development of fuller/composite measurements of quality and equality, and provide increased support to national governments' capacity to collect, store and analyse administrative data. The ambition should be to develop national and international data sets that can express and track the multidimensionality of inequality
- Increase reporting, disaggregated by age and sex where possible, on aid to education and gender equality.

Post-2015 framework

- Education must remain a global priority in the Post-2015 Framework, with goals and targets that encourage support for all girls and boys, including the most marginalised, to complete at least nine years of quality education
- Education goals, targets and indicators should encourage reductions in gender and other inequalities in access, transition, completion of a quality education
- The Post-2015 framework should include a stand-alone gender equality goal, and have gender equality mainstreamed through all goals, including a goal on education. Goals, targets and indicators should encourage funding and policy measures which target broader social change, tackle the root causes of gender inequality, and support gender equality in schools.

Education First

- While recognising the importance of achieving the current set of MDGs, a lack of attention to the transition to post-primary means that millions of adolescents are absent. The *Education First Initiative* must continue to strengthen efforts to ensure that girls and boys are able to successfully transition to post-primary education
- The *Education First Initiative* does not go far enough in terms of challenging particular political, economic and social norms which give rise to the barriers that girls face in accessing and competing education. The Initiative should galvanise support from governments and donors to recognise and tackle the barriers to girls' education, such as child marriage, gender-based violence and negative gender norms
- The *Education First Initiative* aims to generate additional and sufficient funding for education through sustained global advocacy efforts. The Initiative should seek to set specific targets that encourage strong, clear and improved financial commitments from governments, donors and the private sector.



Photo: Plan

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