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**INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL**

**Access and participation of women and girls to education, training,  
science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal  
access to full employment and decent work**

**Remaining barriers to women's and girls' access to and participation in  
education and training\***

**Submitted by**

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\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

## **Introduction**

Fifteen years after the Beijing Platform for Action and ten years into the 2015 targets for Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), achievements towards furthering the gender-related goals of the global development agenda need to be recognized and celebrated. The mobilization and collective actions of countless stakeholders, ranging from national Governments, multi- and bilateral cooperation agencies, civil society and non-governmental organizations, philanthropic foundations, to community and youth groups have paid off in absolute and relative terms.

Regarding the specific gender-related goals of both EFA and the MDGs, tangible opportunities have opened up for large numbers of girls an

despite the adoption of a “free” education policy at basic levels, families are still subjected to paying fees. Boy preference, often based on false expectations of higher returns by many poor families, increases the chances of girls being kept out of school (GMR 2010). This is also closely linked to the question of **transition into post-basic cycles**. It has been argued that primary

investment. Hence, there is a need for education which empowers women socially and economically so that they can contribute to the positive transformation of their societies, communities and families, with **gender equality and equity** as an end goal.

Acute limitations in **alternatives to the formal education system**, the restricted choices facing girls and young women in secondary and higher education environments (Mulugeta 2010), and the severe trend towards **privatization** of post-basic education, contribute to preventing quality educational expansion for girls and women (Sarr-Sow, 2010). As unemployment rises across the globe, even girls from the middle classes will be affected. Economists such as Moser (1993) have shown that in times of economic recession, women tend to bear the brunt of the family's survival, and rural women even more so.

With the current **global financial crisis**, the tendency to divest from education and health and to divert funds toward the productive sectors poses a risk to protecting gains made over the past 20 years. The World Bank (2009) warns about the risks of not reaching the MDGs and EFA goals if national Governments and development cooperation agencies move to remove education as a priority and reduce or withdraw their support to lesser-endowed countries. The GMR 2010 points out that most countries in the South finance their education system to the tune of 80 per cent, yet with the recession, it is likely that many countries in Sub-Saharan African countries may slash their education budgets by 10 per cent per primary

Third, there is a need to develop **mechanisms to monitor gender equality in the education system**. It is not enough to bring in women and girls, count them and leave them to their own devices in an unfriendly, male-biased environment. There is a need to know what happens to women once they are in the system and where they go within the system and outside the system, and why. Only then would we be able to adopt specific measures to address their specific issues. As it currently stands, very few countries have such mechanisms in place and these are usually set up by NGOs and multilateral organizations.

Fourth, **approaches and interventions must be strategic in nature** to bring about **lasting transformation** in the education system, both formal and non-formal. While the provision of scholarships is necessary for the most vulnerable and the poor to offset the other costs of education, it is more strategic for stakeholders to lobby for the **complete abolition of tuition fees** and other costs of basic education. Son preference is still prevalent in many conservative communities when parental means are also limited. Advocacy for adoption and **enforcement of school fee abolition** should be part of a comprehensive national plan that provides adequate budgetary allocations to learning institutions to offset direct and indirect costs of schooling for poor children.

It goes without saying that **addressing these is Twf**

emerging interest in TVET and employment readiness, as well as math, science and technology for girls. That is why there is a need for gender-responsive policies and programmes that target girls and women specifically, especially in light of the enormous pressures on the post-primary level of education in many countries. There is also a need for non-formal education targeting female teenage dropouts and young adults who leave the system early. This includes literacy and life skills training. It is also important to make linkages between this kind of training and issues that affect women and girls such as health and sanitation, HIV and AIDS education and prevention, and income generation activities.

Additionally, the infrastructure and resources requ

- Making schools and surrounding communities harassment-free zones
- Mobilizing communities to support girls' education and abandon harmful practices that keep girls out of school
- In rural areas, entrepreneurship training is paramount to empower girls for self-employment.