

UNICEF's role and policies in the promotion and implementation of the right to education.
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Madam Chairperson, members of the CEDAW Committee, colleagues

As an organization that grounds all its work in the human rights of children and women, UNICEF is pleased to participate in this discussion today, and to support your Committee in the development of a general recommendation to guide States in the implementation of the right to education.

We are particularly pleased today to share the podium with our sister agency UNESCO, with our UNICEF Ethiopia national ambassador and activist for girls' education Hannah Godefa, and the other distinguished panelists.

UNICEF has been advocating for children's right to education since its inception 65 years ago. Our aim in the countries where we work is to support the achievement of the goal of quality education for all through policies, programmes and innovative initiatives that include measures to support girls' and women's participation and performance in education. UNICEF's new Gender Policy takes this further by stating that in order to make progress towards gender equality, we must also work to prevent and end gender-based discrimination and accelerate strategies that address societal power structures and discrimination against women to enable equality of outcomes. For our work in education, this means not only ensuring equal access, but also developing the capacity of education systems to recognize and address gender-based discrimination, and empowering girls as well as boys to participate in decision making and claim their right to education.

More than half of the 57 million children of primary school age who are not in school are girls. The most significant barriers that impede access to primary and secondary education in both rural and urban areas include gender blind curricula and teaching practices, gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices, inadequate and unsafe environments, and an education system that does not reach the most vulnerable and at risk children, especially those who have dropped out, many of whom are girls. Early marriage and teen pregnancies also represent significant barriers preventing girls from completing primary school and transitioning to secondary education, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

UNICEF and its partners in the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), including UNESCO, have supported measures to promote equitable access to education for girls such as school fee abolition, girls' scholarships and stipends, advocacy and programming for inclusive education for children with disabilities and those who belong to poor, indigenous, or ethnic and linguistic minority groups. In sub-Saharan Africa, UNICEF has played a noteworthy role in advocacy for re-entry policies to protect and keep pregnant girls and young mothers in school. On all continents, countries have brought back to school millions of girls through 'Back to School' campaigns and other strategies.

In the last decade, a number of countries have made progressive gains in acknowledging gender as a dimension of disparity in education and in integrating policies and strategies that promote

parity and equity within national education systems. Proactive advocacy to include the integration of girls' education in national Education Sector Plans has led to measures that address girls' access and learning achievement, and other underlying causes that impede girls' right to education. For example, based on global evidence, the UNGEI has been promoting policies against gender-based violence in schools within national education systems.

Madam Chairperson,

Keeping girls in school requires that parents, community members, educators, policymakers and partners address larger contextual issues. In many countries, UNICEF has worked innovatively with governments and partners to raise questions about gender stereotypes within society and raise the awareness of boys and men, and community leaders. This has also led to inter-generational dialogue to raise pertinent issues of early marriage, birth registration, sexual and reproductive rights and education.

Our extensive field experience has taught us that girls' and women's empowerment and inclusion in education must be based on a comprehensive framework that spans across the life cycle, from early childhood development and learning to second chance education for out of school girls, and improving employability and labor market skills. In the past 8 years, for example, we have supported corporate mentorship programs in that have enabled girls to perform better in secondary school, make informed career choices and productively participate in the economy by developing competitive skills in traditionally male dominated engineering, mathematics and technology sectors.

In the last decade, the world has seen remarkable progress in achieving gender parity in primary education. The discussions of the post-2015 development agenda provide us with a unique opportunity to secure commitment towards gender equality in education. UNICEF will continue to advocate for an end to discrimination and skewed power relations based on gender, as well as for the empowerment of girls and women. We want to see a world where all girls and boys, women and men, have the freedom and choice to design their own life paths and reach their full potential.

I am sure a General Recommendation by your Committee on the right to education will be an important step in supporting States in achieving this vision. UNICEF remains ready to continue to providing support to this end.

Thank you