EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF WOMEN AND THE GIRL-CHILD

ONLINE DISCUSSION FOR THE REVIEW OF BEIJING+10
(UNESCO/UNICEF)

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Introduction

In March 2005, the 49th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will review the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995). The review will include the appraisal of Beijing+5 known as the outcome document, produced at the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000), as well as contributions from governments and institutions for Beijing+10. To complement this process a number of on-line discussions were organized to engage a wider audience in discussing strategic objectives identified in the Beijing Platform for Action as critical to women's rights. One such discussion, "Education and Training of Women and the Girl-child", was moderated by UNESCO and ran from January 10 to February 4, 2005.

This on-line discussion merged two strategic objectives: Objective B: Education and Training of Women, and Objective L: the Girl-child with responsibility to UNESCO and UNICEF respectively.

The discussion on Education and Training of Women and the Girl-child identified four topics for discussion:
- Universal access to education, still a challenge for many girls and women;
- Quality of education and its impact on outcomes;
- Political and financial commitments of governments and the international community;
- Education and empowerment of women and girls.

Questions were prepared for each topic to help guide participants comments. 246 persons registered on the site, and 126 participated actively by sending in contributions to the discussion.

This paper summarizes contributions from participants and highlights major areas of concern, achievements and next steps.

1.0 Week 1: Universal access to education, still a challenge for many girls and women.

Universal access to education was chosen as the first topic and challenged participants to discuss the causes of low enrolment, transition and retention for girls and women at all levels of education from early childcare, through primary, secondary and higher education, as well as non-formal and literacy programmes. A number of short questions where prepared in areas known to have an impact on female participation in education. The questions were designed to stimulate thought and to engage the participants in discussion, encouraging them to use examples of successes and failures, gaps and the way forward in ensuring universal education.

Contributions were received from thirty-one (31) participants on this topic discussing a range of issues. Some main obstacles were identified (socio-cultural and religious practices, availability of water hygiene and sanitation, financing education, pregnancy, relevance of education programmes, distance from school and lack of security). Participants also shared proposed next steps and progress to achieve female education.

1.1 Obstacles

1.1.1 *Socio-cultural and religious practices, attitudes and behaviour*

Almost all contributions indicated negative social attitudes and cultural practices as a hindrance to female participation in education. These took the form of parental preference for the education of boys over girls and socialisation within strict gender roles.

> *"It is generally believed that the family name is preserved in the linage of the male child, hence the male child should be better equipped than the female in order to get a good job and provide for the family. It is believed that women are mainly for the purpose of reproduction and domestic activity, hence (there is) no need to educate them, as this is a waste of resources". (Obote Karo)*

> *"Patriarchy maintains on the one hand domination structures against women and children and on the other hand a certain type of socialization that maintain boys and men suffering a kind of 'masculinity' that….(prevents…) the possibilities of constructing an equitable society" (Vernor Munoz, UN special rapporteur on the right to education)*

> *"Fathers believe that it is of no use sending their girl child to school because another person will eventually marry her and she will be another persons' family. Others believe that if you send a girl/woman to school she will be more exposed and civilized and cannot be under a man any longer. Still others think a woman's*

job is in the home and she does not need to go to school to learn it". (Ijeoma Obidigbo, Nigeria)

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" Some tribes believe that women/girls don't need education, therefore women and girls have no right to get educated. In the Wazaramo tribe for example, most girls end in standard 7, then get married. For graduate females most of the women are busy taking care of their children and husband." (Judith Katundabwile, Tanzania)

"The problem of enrolment starts in the early stages. In early childcare parents enroll boys and encourage them to study hard, while girls are encouraged to learn domestic chores as one day they will become mothers /wives. Hence as they grow to primary secondary and higher education their numbers decrease. " (Sarah Mwanbalaswa, Tanzania)

According to a study by CREDIF in Tunisia, girls drop out at a higher rate than boys, and girls in the rural areas drop out at an even higher rate than those in the urban areas. Girls drop out more for social and family reasons than for education related reasons. (Chokri Memni, CREDIF, Tunisia)[1].

Some participants indicated religion as a major hindrance to girls and women's education. While not unanimous, participants generally agreed that religion could easily be misinterpreted and used to prevent female participation in education.

"The weight of socio-cultural and religious beliefs and attitudes remain very strong and play an important role in preventing girls from going to school and women from participating in literacy classes (Yakaré Soumano, Mali)

"Some religions do not allow girls/women to be seen in public places or to mix up with their opposite sex, so it becomes a problem sending girls/women to school". (Ijeoma Obidgbo, Nigeria)

In one case it was shown how tradition and authority could influence parents/society and have a negative impact on girls education.

"My cry for now is the case in Swaziland where the king has just married a 17 year old (who is still considered a child) as his 13th wife. (The girl has obviously dropped out of school and chances of her continuing at a later date are not certain) The type of authority (traditional) being practices in Swaziland leaves much to be desired...." (Brenda Kambaila, Central Africa)

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[1] The author translated this contribution and all others received in French.

1.1.2 *The availability of water, hygiene and sanitation services*

The availability of water, hygiene and sanitation services were seen as important to female participation in schools.

> *"School attendance, educational performance by girls and teacher recruitment and retention rates are adversely affected where there are inadequate water and sanitation facilities and hygiene behavior for a variety of reasons related to health issues, the burden of domestic and water carrying duties and private issues for girls". (Julie Fisher, WEDC, Loughborough University UK)*

> *"In many areas in Greece the lack of fresh water is a serious problem – this is especially true in the Islands…many times in the past outbreaks of infections and illnesses have caused death among school children. There have been cases of meningitis reported. Whenever there is a problem with sanitation or a lack of water in the schools children refuse to attend school. This is especially true of girls who are vulnerable". (Estelle Angelinas, Greece)*

1.1.3 *Household poverty and poor financing of education*

Several participants cited the lack of funds as a barrier to female participation in education. Poverty at the household level discourages parents from enrolling their children in school or withdrawing them once the demand for fees become impossible to meet. It could also be the inability of the government to provide adequate funding for school infrastructure or for the running of schools.

> *"This (household poverty) is one of the major factors that prevent women/girls from having access to education. Some parents have been convinced of the need to send their girl child to school but they cannot afford to do so because of the lack of fund. The public schools are not even affordable for them and there is no scheme for such people." (Ijeoma Obidigbo, Nigeria)*

> *"In Tanzania, most of the women lack funds for education." (Judith Katundabwile, Tanzania)*

Money also plays a role in the 'quality' of school girls/women have access to. Private institutions, some of which provide quality education but at a relatively high cost, are increasingly becoming education providers. Government education institutions are often poorly funded and therefore of poorer quality. As a result, the rich attend well-funded schools while the poor have access to schools with inadequate facilities, reinforcing disparities in access retention and completion. This is especially true for female learners who already start from a cultural and social disadvantage. The situation is worse in rural areas as opposed to urban areas where schools are fewer and money is scarce.

"The challenge does not lie in numbers but the quality of education. There is a small minority of girls and boys receiving quality education in private schools while the majorities in public schools are languishing in overcrowded understaffed classrooms with very few teaching and learning resources. The situation is even worse in the rural and urban slums; in my view it is poverty that we should be addressing" (Joyce Abonyo, Kenya)

1.1.4 *Education relevance*:

On the issue of relevance participants noted that the courses and subjects offered could be a limiting factor for female participation. Gender streaming in curriculum with girls offered 'feminine' courses and boys 'masculine' courses often discourages girls from taking more challenging subjects with higher market returns.

"Even though all subjects are open to both boys and girls, girls are often discouraged from taking subjects traditionally thought of as "for boys" such as computer programming and management. They are told by parents and other well meaning adults that these are for boys". (Estelle Angelinas, Greece)

"Some courses in school are termed masculine and others feminine. When a girl is not allowed to go for a course of her choice that discourages some of them from going to school."(Ijeoma Obidigbo, Nigeria)

1.1.5 *Pregnancy:*

Pregnancy was raised by a number of participants as an issue that prevented schoolgirls from completing their education. Several examples were given to illustrate innovative policies and community interventions to reintegrate girls into the school system.

"Very little has been done to support pregnant and mothering teens that drop out of school." (Bertha Mkwelele)

1.2.0 *Achievements and progress:*

In addition to the list of obstacles, a number of participants highlighted areas where progress had been made. They include the following:

1.2.1 *Increased advocacy on female education*

Governments and civil society have increased advocacy for female participation in education.

"In Mali, I met an imam from Timbuctou, and he spoke passionately for 30 min. about girls education. He believed that there were a lot of bad influences out there, but you can't put your head in the sand. The best defense is a solid (and liberal) education. He will support his daughters as high as they wish to go in their education, although I doubt they will become imam". (Wes Darou, Canadian International Development Agency, Canada)

1.2.2 *Implicating women and the community in school activities*

Implicating women in school activities either as teachers or mothers has a positive impact on female education. Involving the community in policy development particularly when it concerned culturally sensitive issues such as pregnant schoolgirls also has a positive impact. Examples were offered from Kenya and Botswana.

"The school's popularity reflects not just community self-help, but also activism on behalf of the female head teacher and other teachers at the school. They have worked hard to put in place a different set of relationships with their pupils and the families to those found in many schools. They have become activists for gender equity through their professional work. They have been trained to promote gender equality by helping the girls in the school and by engaging with their parents and the community, which they do partly through running workshops exploring issues such as girls' rights and cultural norms.

Another example of the need to advocate with families and communities to overcome socio-cultural barriers to girls' education is the 'Diphalana' initiative, started in 1996 in Botswana as an alternative to regulations requiring pregnant girls to withdraw from school and only re-enter under certain conditions. As a result, The Ministry of Education in Botswana has now reduced the stay away period for pregnant students throughout the country from 12 to 6 months. Diphalana illustrates that adventurous approaches in public policy, whilst often evoking strong feelings, can sometimes shift private perceptions." (Elaine Unterhalter, UK)

1.2.3 *Introduction of income generating activities*

Income generating activities have been introduced in communities to supplement household income and help meet the cost of education. The group activity also plays a role in female socialisation providing a medium for women to support and encourage each other socially and economically.

"Household poverty is indeed a barrier to educating girls and women. To resolve this problem a number of promising practices have been undertaken such as income generating activities for women's groups organised in conjunction with literacy programmes."(Yakaré Soumano, Mali)

> *"The organisation of cooperatives is an ideal solution since it offers an opportunity for education as well as a possibility to improve socio-economic status". (Hind Ottmanani, Morroco)*

1.3 *Next steps/Actions to improve female education*

1.3.1 *Conduct studies to identify problem*

Given that the causes of poor enrolment and dropout are varied and have a local context, it is important that research be conducted to identify the problems associated with low female participation. This approach will ensure that appropriate solutions are identified and tailored to address the obstacles.

> *"As a solution we organised research activities in areas showing high incidence of poor enrolment for girls: the family, the school, and the home." (Chokri Memni, CREDIF, Tunisia)*

1.3.2 *Collect gender disaggregated data and analyse these for use in planning*

It is important to collect accurate data disaggregated by gender and by locality and age in order to identify the groups that are most affected and target resources accordingly.

> *"We need reliable data. A minimum monitoring or management information system should be in place. Many countries have an EMIS (education management information system) in place and regularly collect the information. The information has to be put into context and shared with those concerned" (Poul Erik Rasmussen, Mozambique)*

1.3.3 *Adapt education to the needs of girls and women including distance learning, radio, etc*

Low female participation in education is often caused by a number of factors many of which cannot be resolved quickly and easily. As a result new and innovative ways of educating girls and women have to be found.

"[These measures include:]

- *going beyond conventional schooling to exploit every other societal structure that helps to educate*
- *taking the schools to the girls and women instead of taking them to school*
- *making the life and everyday needs of girls and women the determinants of curriculum content". (Pai Obanya, Nigeria)*

"In the process of reading around the different development perspectives on this issue, it seems that the desire to educate the women needs to be harnessed, and that different ways of doing "school" need to be presented to the village, so that the cultural rules are no longer such a barrier. There are examples in Baluchistan of mobile training units. There is also possible scope for increasing the health education input through the clinic."(Catherine Wiggins, UK)

Many participants mentioned introducing distance learning as a possible solution, particularly for rural women. Unfortunately, family, time and lack of information are major constraints to their effective use.

"In Bolivia, the ACISJF (Association catholique internationale de service à la jeunesse féminine) has put in place with the help of teachers, an education service for the excluded of the formal system which functions in the evenings and night. (Odile Moreau, Présidente internationale ACISJF).

1.3.4 *Identify success stories, publicise them and bring them to scale*

There are many good examples of what works in girls' education. Unfortunately the examples are on a small scale and they are not well publicised so that others may learn from them.

"Some communities, schools and projects often generate excellent responses, which are successful in promoting girls' access and learning, while others are frustrated in lack of ideas. There is a need to identify success stories and examples of excellence, to document them and to evaluate their potential replicability. This could be done at district as well as at national level. It is critical, however, that a particular group of people or a unit is designated this responsibility. Examples include: Bursaries for secondary school girls, safe Schools campaigns, recruitment and training of rural women as teachers, deployment of women teachers to rural areas. FAWE has been successful in canvassing for female education rights." (Poul Erik Rasmussen, Mozambique)

1.3.5 *Encourage partnerships between civil society, governments and donors*

Participants stressed the value of reinforcing partnerships between civil society, governments and donors to promote and increase awareness in education and participation.

"Put in place a concerted effort between civil society and governments at the "regional" level so as to take into consideration the weight of culture, the wealth of culture and available local support". (Odile Moreau, ACISJF).

"The importance of gender equality is recognized by most NGOs and this is reflected in their programs and mandates. The organization of which I am director, Project Against Domestic Violence (PADV), has produced education materials and public awareness campaigns to raise awareness of issues relating to gender. We have used village and school presentations, media campaigns as well as produced publications such as storybooks for children to increase awareness". (Phally Hor, Cambodia)

1.3.6 *Support back to school projects for dropouts and pregnant girls*

Some pointed out the importance of giving students who have dropped out of school for any number of reasons an opportunity to return to school in an enabling environment.

"These students have individual programmes to meet their needs and build their confidence and self esteem. They are encouraged to complete their secondary school qualifications using distance learning and to prepare for tertiary education. In addition they are involved in special programmes that assist them in their important parental role. The Pre-School provides appropriate programmes for the children; mothers can breast feed their babies during the day, and transport has been donated to assist the girls and their children to get to school. An Association of Teen Parent Educators of New Zealand has been established."(Dorothy Meyer, New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women, New Zealand)

1.3.7 *Encourage free schooling for girls*

Scholarships, or the elimination of fees, should be considered as a means of overcoming the problem of funding and thus increasing female participation in education.

"If women do not contribute to development they become a burden and a source of underdevelopment. Make an effort to provide girls and women with free education, that are the source of education and instruction for children." (Masomo Christophe, Président de l'ONGD Kôngo-Développement, Kinshasa, R.D.Congo.)

2.0 Week Two: Quality of education and its impact on outcomes

During the second week, thirty participants sent in contributions addressing the subject of quality education and its impact on outcomes. Judging from the comments and level of discussion, participants seem to have had some difficulty defining quality education and therefore identifying examples of what has worked and next steps. Nevertheless a number of valuable contributions emerged that can be grouped into four main headings as follows.

2.1 *Definition/understanding of quality education*

Following the discussion it was clear that participants did not have a common understanding or definition of quality education or what it entails, which is to be expected. Some participants linked quality to the choice of subjects and the ability to find jobs in their area of expertise, while others linked quality to the content.

> *"Quality education must include a gender perspective. This is because a quality education must offer ever one who has access to it an education that is appropriate for the development of their full capacity to be responsible for themselves as well as to participate in public life. Because the life contexts of men and women have important differences, education must recognise these, and must enable both men and women to see which differences must be met, and how, if women are to live securely in a just society". (Jennifer Strauss, IFUW, Australia)*

> *"In high levels of education there are very few girls who qualify to join various courses and in most cases they join those ones which are not competitive, and as a result find it difficult to compete in the job market once they complete [their studies]". (Imelda Salum, Tanzania)*

Others linked quality education to evidence of a positive impact in the lives of women and girls.

> *"Education is just for building the personality of girls and women and enables them to organize their lives and have all their basic rights. So we can say when Education has positive impact on the lives of girls and women, we can say that "This is quality education" and it would definitely have good impact on outcomes." (Shahzada Din)*

> *"Another issue is self-confidence. Even for women who went to school, there is still a gap between their educational background and their position in the society. The education should therefore include areas and subjects that would help the girls and women to develop attitudes that enable them to build up confidence in*

themselves and be aware of the fact that they can be better than what they are now: they have to be ambitious!" (Yolanda Fouda, Cameroon)

A number of participants raised the issue of indicators to measure quality in education. An answer was provided by the Beyond Access Project.

"Four measures have been used to develop the scorecard as a weighted index: these are girls' attendance rate at primary school; girls' survival rate over 5 years in primary schooling; girls' secondary Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) and a country's gender development index (GDI)."(Chloe Challender and Elaine Unterhalter, The Beyond Access Project, University of London)

2.2 *Quality for what outcome*

Some participants questioned whether education should not be tailored to the needs of the individual for use in her environment. Questions were raised such as, what are girls educated for? And what kind of education for girls and women?

"A further issue is what the girls are educated for: is it enough to follow the demands of their culture and concentrate on skills that will benefit the child rearing role they perform within the home? On the one hand this seems to fall short of the ideals of human development and the human right to education, on the other, perhaps this needs to be seen as a positive step in a long journey." (Kathryn Wiggins, UK)

"The level of education is irrelevant for both men and women provided it makes them productive in their community. This means that female education should respond to the needs of the environment. It is sufficient to enable women in rural areas to be useful in resolving social problems at their level instead of teaching them methods that can be used only in town. That is why we insist on educating women within their culture first of all and then in relation to their environment." *(Masomo Christophe, R.D.Congo)*

2.3 *Gender streaming in curriculum and subject choices*

A number of participants pointed out that emphasising quality education was essential in order to evaluate outcomes and move beyond access and numbers. This point was clearly illustrated using examples of gender streaming in subject choices at all levels of education but particularly in post-primary education.

"Saudi Arabia is a clear example of a country where access and availability is NOT enough. All education is gender separated, curriculum actually emphasizes women's subordinate role to men, and university programs clearly discriminate

against women in the fields that are offered. The new Prince Mohammed University that is due to open soon paraded the fact that engineering classes will be offered to both men and women. However women are only taught architecture, while civil, mechanical and chemical engineering classes, as well as architecture classes, are available to men." (Hanaa Almoaibed, Saudi Arabia)

"It would theoretically be illegal to deny any student entry to a course on the basis of gender, but where places are restricted due to financial exigencies or lack of specialist teachers (Australia has a shortage of maths teachers), then there is anecdotal evidence that students may be pressured, more or less subtly, into or out of courses according to gender stereotypes - e.g. 'It is more important for boys' future career prospects to have access to maths, science and IT, so they really should have first choice of these places', 'But girls are best at literature, so you will have a better chance of a good result in that than you might get in maths". (Jennifer Strauss IFUW,Australia)

2.4 *Teacher quality*

The quality of teacher training, their preparedness and gender sensitivity were identified as important to ensuring quality education for girls. The presence of female teachers in positions of responsibility such as in career advisory services was seen as crucial to girl's full participation.

"With the concept of recruiting Para teachers with a nominal or minimal educational qualifications and no training in teaching, the quality is so poor that there is practically no teaching - learning activity going on in these schools. As a result most of the students drop out and the few remaining fail to progress. If we look at the knowledge and skills gained by the children from these schools, even after seven years of schooling they hardly can read and write in the local language."(Jennifer Strauss, IFUW, Australia)

"Some university faculties (e.g. engineering, IT) do make specific attempts to encourage female enrolments. The marked absence of female academic staff in such faculties, especially at career and senior levels, may however be a discouragement to female students. Even in humanities and the social sciences, the predominance of male academics at career levels and the number of females in casual staffing means that females may experience a lack of mentoring, of 'matronage' (although there are certainly male academics, as there are male school teachers, willing to champion the interests of female students)". (Jennifer Strauss IFUW Australia)

2.5 *Curriculum content and relevance*

The content of the curriculum and its relevance to the students' life is important in engaging their interest and consequently their assimilation of what is taught. Curriculum should take into consideration a gender perspective, nationality, language and ethnicity of the target population.

> *"A wider dissemination of this research is indispensable to support more strategic interventions that focus not just in mainstreaming gender in anachronic educational policies and programs but to open the debate on the kind of educational policies we need today in order to address the needs and experiences of diverse groups and cultures and to reverse social exclusion and deep inequalities." (Gloria Bonder, Director of Regional Training Program on Gender and Public Policies (PRIGEPP), FLACSO Argentina)*

> *"Rights and responsibilities must be taught as assiduously as are language and mathematics. Education for personal value and self-worth must be encouraged, incited, supported, and instilled now by formal means as much as through the old informal avenues, which are clearly not quite enough on their own". (Shirley Osborne, Carribbean Family and Children's Services and the Girls Education Project)*

> *"We can only achieve quality by addressing the importance of gender equality in education by clearly showing evidence on how increasing awareness of social issues have contributed to changing peoples' lives. For example domestic violence needs to be part of informal education. In order to raise awareness and understanding on how this issue can contribute to poor quality of education." (Bertha Mkwelele, Tanzania)*

2.6 *An integrated approach to education*

Some participants mentioned that the answer to gender equality is the promotion of a holistic approach to education.

> *"The scorecard findings indicate the importance of a number of features outside the education system that appear crucial in sustaining initiatives to enhance girls' access to and retention in schooling. These are peace and democratic governance; a thriving women's movement or widespread concern with gender equity; a well-supported and well-resourced public schooling system where regional inequalities are being redressed and an integration of public policy with regard to education, health and economic policy. Political leadership on all these issues appears a crucial dimension of developing education that has both quality and gender equality". (Chloe Challender and Elaine Unterhalter, UK)*

2.7 Rural urban disparities

Another participant cited the gap between welfare and facilities between urban and rural areas as a key factor in causing gender disparity in education.

> *"Over here in Nigeria, it is only in the cities that quality education is obtainable, not without an extra cost. [The] Majority of the women and girls are in the rural areas because women are less mobile than men. It's virtually impossible to obtain quality education in the rural areas." (Ijeoma Obidigbo, Nigeria)*

> *"You cannot think of quality education without a classroom and some of these schools in the rural areas have no classrooms. The lack of social amenities also contributes to these; since there is no electricity and good access roads, etc, it becomes impossible to equip these schools. For instance, the students cannot acquire computer skills without electricity. Some private investors are discouraged because of lack of these amenities because their running cost will be outrageous". (Ijeoma Obidigbo, Nigeria)*

3.0 Week Three: Political and financial commitments of governments and the international community

The topic on the third week of discussion focused on Political and financial commitments of governments and the international community to female education. Twenty-two participants sent in comments, with somewhat less discussion than the previous two topics. In spite of the explanatory note and lead questions for the topic many of the comments from participants addressed issues of empowerment rather than government and international commitment as indicated. The comments are summarized as follows:

3.1 Inadequate government investment in education, especially in female education

Education is the responsibility of governments, and when governments fail to invest in education the system fails and quality education suffers. Countries in which governments have made financial and political commitments in education have shown remarkable benefits and growth in their development.

> *"Investing in Education has been proved to be the only way of increasing development pace. I always like to take the example of Malaysia which invested heavily in its education sector over a period of forty years, which is just one generation) and look at what that has done for that country, they are now competing with the first world." (Phosile Sichinga, Zambia)*

> *"Regarding education, financial support provided to the Ministry of Education is still a small amount and detrimentally affects the quality of education and the capability of public schools. It is estimated that primary school teachers receive $20 – 30 a month and secondary school teachers receive $40 – 50 a month. Many NGOs in Cambodia have established programs to fill the gaps in education."* *(Phally Hor, Cambodia)*

3.2 *Increasing privatisation of education*

Governments are investing less in education making way for private sector providers to fill the gap. As a result education is becoming increasingly expensive and unavailable to the poor.

> *"The private sector seems to be taking over the [education] sector and due to the capitalistic nature of private sector involvement this simply means access is limited to the 'haves'." (Phosile Sichinga, the Zambia Association of University Women, Lusaka, Zambia)*

3.3 *Inadequate government commitment to gender equality and girls' education*

Political and financial commitment to gender equality in education is minimal in many countries. Governments have not sufficiently addressed issues that inhibit female participation in education either by reviewing their legislation or by mainstreaming gender issues in their education policies. In addition budgetary allocations to education are low and very little is invested in female education.

> *"If our governments continue to be gender-blind and insist on allocating peanuts to the education sector then we shall continue to reap poor performance in sectors of our development index." (Phosile Sichinga, Zambia)*

3.4 *Women in positions of responsibility*

Some participants felt that governments have a responsibility to encourage women to take up positions of responsibility. The presence of women in leadership positions is a positive outcome of education and should be a catalyst to changing societal behaviour and attitudes towards women. Participants felt that women in positions of responsibility tended to be more sensitive to girls' and women's needs and can act as positive role models.

> *"Another area is that of acknowledging women as leaders. If for example, a woman is at the helm of affairs within political or government levels, the issue of gender equality is bound to be addressed. This will provide better education of*

women/girls and possibly an allocation in the national budget towards this cause. (Vivian Ike)

"Our current administration has appointed a woman as Minister of Education. Hopefully, she will be able to improve things for girls. There has been an attempt to improve the education of girls and give them equal opportunities. However, education isn't always a top priority in government. The facilities are in poor condition. In many places the schools and universities don't have that many programmes for girls. Meanwhile, the traditional ones are already taken up."(Estelle Angelinas, Greece)

3.5 *Inadequate focus on gender mainstreaming in education*

Although many governments and donors acknowledge the importance of gender parity and equality in education they lack the tools for gender mainstreaming and indicators to measure progress. As a result gender issues are not effectively mainstreamed in education policies

"The PEDP lacks in terms of monitoring indicators for gender issues. Gender is lumped under crosscutting issues and it is marginalised. The 2003 Joint PEDP review team paid superficial attention to the gender issue as can be seen from the report but also as narrated by the team members. Donor community, government and NGOs alike, are not seriously concerned with the gender issue. What we hear are rhetorical statements but limited action." (Prof. Verdiana Masanja, Mathematics Department, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)

3.6 *Scholarships, special programmes and preferential treatment for girls and women*:

Given that girls and women are starting from a position of disadvantage, some participants pointed out the need for governments to put in place special measures to encourage female participation in education until gender parity and equality have been achieved. The special measures could include scholarship programmes, single- sex schools, leadership programmes, maternal and child care programmes etc.

"Women development centres should be created and made accessible to those who are less privileged and can't raise the stipulated amount by granting scholarships and/or subsidizing the fees." (Obote Oghenekaro, Nigeria)

"Another way in which the government will change the status quo in women/girl child education is by setting up scholarship schemes to encourage the outstanding female students and those offering the so-called masculine courses in school, and also to take care of those that could not afford to go to school financially." (Ijeoma Obidigbo, Nigeria)

The requirements for women seeking admission into schools should also be reviewed. Since they are being encouraged to go to school, their own minimum requirements should be lower than that of their male counterparts at least for now."(Ijeoma Obidigbo, Nigeria)

" I feel the government should make provisions for girls schools, especially at the college levels. [The] reason is because some parents tend to be 'over-protective' of their female children against abuse, having sexual relationships with the opposite sex etc. They feel safer when they know that their female children are in the midst of the same sex and also have teachers of the same sex." (Obote Oghenekaro, Nigeria)

3.7 *Bridging the poverty gap*

Given that education is the foundation for sustainable development, governments should undertake a holistic approach in their efforts to achieve education for all. Poverty reduction programmes are crucial to ensuring equitable and quality education with lasting results.

"Women figure critically in many developed countries with areas of severe social deprivation. Inner cities and depressed traditional industrial areas in the USA and UK have very poor results for human development indicators. Women disproportionately bear the consequences of inadequate or completely failed provision in education and other key social services. This observation suggests that as much as poverty is a cause of physical resource constraints, it is also a failure of will in leadership at the highest political and administrative levels of government. On this issue, developed and developing countries are equal." (Risto F. Harma, Education, Economics and Child Labour Researcher)

3.8 *Weak international commitment*

Meeting the right to education requires government commitment (financial and political) as well as support from the international community. An evaluation of international commitments in education (e.g. the FTI) shows that internal commitments have not always come through as promised. Critics of this failure have pointed to a number of weaknesses in the system.

"The problem with aid monitoring only underscores the point that there are no quick fixes for the development process. Current calls for large increases in aid should instead be redirected towards advocating a package of policies designed to solve particular development problems, for which aid should form a part, but only when it can be verified as an effective solution, or as part of a solution, to the given problem. Such policies should include better coordination between donors

and development agencies - or what has been referred to as "joined up government". (Risto F. Harma)

"There are very serious problems monitoring aid programmes. Without effective monitoring, aid acts as a destabilising influence given the size of the flows relative to developing country living standards. There is a large literature on aid effectiveness, both academic and at a policy level. It also ties into the literature on corruption." (Risto F. Harma)

3.9 *Need to politicise female education and raise awareness at all levels of the government*

Education touches on different aspects of life and can be denied by a number of factors outside the education sector. As a result an intersectoral approach should be used in implementing policies and programmes, engaging other sectors/ministries and actors within and outside the government. Female education needs to be high on the government agenda and should be politicised in the same manner as other issues considered pressing and crucial to development.

"The foundation of all the solutions to this problem is the reorientation of the masses especially in the rural areas. Many people already have fixed ideas and beliefs regarding the education of women and the girl-child. They need to be convinced to believe in the importance. In other words I will say that the need for women/girl child education should be marketed in all possible ways. The Information Ministry, its National Orientation Agency and others should be seriously involved in this mass literacy campaign on the women/girl child education just as they are being used for Immunization, HIV/AIDS campaign and others." (Ijeoma Obidigbo, Nigeria)

4.0 Week Four: Education and empowerment of women and girls

During the fourth and final week of the discussion forty-three participants exchanged views during the discussion. This topic incited a great deal of discussion, mostly around the subject of empowerment, its use and definition in education.

4.1 *Achievements in promoting female education*

A number of participants gave examples of the positive changes that have taken place in the education sector over the last few years, citing advances in education policies, behaviour change in society as well as progress in women's empowerment.

"I was making a point and said that in Sri Lanka when we talk of a teacher we call 'she' because the majority (over 60%) of teachers are women, whereas then Bangladesh had only 15% female teachers. Then one key official in the

directorate of education loudly asked me 'Why don't you have men in your country?' and all participants gave a silly laughter to me. I remember this well. I left Bangladesh in 1996 and came back for a second term again and served until the end 2003.

"Today, after 15 years, the change is unbelievable. Over 40% of the teachers are females today. The policy that we pushed in 1991 to get 65% female teachers at recruitment, has worked well. Moreover, today no one will make such a silly remark and it is an accepted fact that the position of the woman needs to be strengthened." (Upali Sedere, Senior Policy Advisor, Ministry of Education, Malawi)

"It was in 1994 the World Bank designed a project (FSSP) to provide stipend to all secondary school girls to promote the surviving girls of the primary schools to continue on to secondary education. Today every secondary school girl in Bangladesh gets a stipend and the largest share of funds come from the government. The female enrollment in secondary schools has increased by 300% by now. Its effect on primary school girls is significant, many of the primary school girls now know that they can go on to secondary education. Ten years before at the Beijing conference, the Bangladesh Female Stipend Project was presented as an innovative project, and at Copenhagen Social Summit. Today when you go to the villages, real rural Bangladesh everywhere and anywhere, it is such a great feeling to have that you get to see hundreds and hundreds of adolescent girls going to schools. The number of female students has out numbered the number of boys in all grade levels in all schools. It is revolution in an Islamic country. An unthinkable change is witnessed. "Educating a girl is educating a generation". If this is the case, in a few years these girls will make sure that their children and their younger siblings go to school, not because of the stipend, but because of the value of education that they have experienced. What will be the changing effect? Does that matter whether they still wear their head-covers and traditional clothes? I don't think so; under these is a more powerful woman who has more identity, dignity and rights." (Upali Sedere, Malawi)

4.2 *Obstacles to female education and empowerment*

Despite this significant advances, female education is still lagging behind male education for reasons that go beyond access. The lack of childcare facilities can be a hindrance to female education. In addition, many scholarships to study abroad do not make allowance for families to move with the recipient. As a result women tend to turn down the opportunity to study abroad, while men are more likely to benefit from such scholarships.

"One of the reasons that women don't pursue demanding careers is due to the fact that it takes them away from their children. Many discontinue their education for the same reason. Maybe if childcare facilities were to be made available it would

make it easier. If a woman knew that she had someone to care for her children while she was studying, or even when working, she would be more inclined to continue." (Estelle Angelinas, Greece)

"Very few donors/scholarships cater for family support for such scholars either to move with their families or at least to check on them once in 3 months. For women who have families, this is extremely difficult since they are compelled to choose between their careers and their children or families. But worse still, it means they are risking their lives staying away from their husbands for so long. I wish donors could reconsider giving women who study abroad family support to help them remain in touch with their families. This would reduce problems like further spread of HIV and raising of delinquent children. Most importantly however, it would encourage more women to pursue more demanding careers and in the long run bring about gender equality in all aspects of life." (Doris Muhwezi, Uganda)

More women than men are faced with the challenge of choosing between family and their career. For many the choice is family over career or education. Hence, more men receive scholarships to undertake doctoral studies abroad, as donors generally will not pay for women to bring their families along.

"Female researchers who were interviewed about studying abroad answered that studying abroad is not a real option to women who have children or who are married. They found that the organizations don't take into consideration the special needs of the researcher's family, and society does not accept the idea of a man "following" his wife[in a] professional way" (Maria Elina Estebañez, Centro de Estudios sobre Ciencia, Desarrollo y Educació n Superior, Argentina)

Women's responsibility within the family also limits her job opportunities and career possibilities with economic consequences for the employer and the employee.

"And then there are the economic-human capital costs of having to choose between family and career and the signal that it sends to women - that women may be more inclined to choose less challenging and less high-value-adding careers because it may mean no time for children. This will reduce the level of human capital in the economy and the level of economic growth therefore, if women respond in this way. Investing in women is investing in economic growth, and together, human development". (Risto Harma)

4.3 *Defining empowerment*

The definition and use of empowerment generated a heated debate, as some participants felt the term was too strong for use in some cultures.

"The subject empowerment is not a good word to deal with women's condition for it is linked to the concept of power, which in turn implies conflict. I would prefer the word shared responsibility because it implies cooperation. The relationship between men and women should not be based on a balance of power but on co-operation. The "empowerment" of women lies within the scope of human rights, which express a special concern for the weak and the suffering, whatever his or her gender, class, race and so on...The empowerment of women should therefore be based on the recognition by society of the different specificity of the woman in her contribution to society (through her job as well as through various commitments, notwithstanding the upbringing of children, the weaker among human beings" (Maylis Gillier)

Other participants tried to explain the significance and importance of the word 'empowerment' in education.

"Please be informed also that concepts such as "shared responsibility" even when exercised are acts that operate on a hierarchy of power; especially in the light of who decides whose responsibility it will be to do what. In addition relationships between men and women are fundamentally relations of power, and the need to "wish it away" will not change that fact. It is true that the empowerment of women lie within the scope of human rights, but it is a scope that has always related to issues of power, and those (Males) who have the power have always controlled the prescriptions of those rights." (Evette Burke-Douglas)

Exercising power is necessary in human interactions provided one has the skill to use it effectively. Education could provide the skills needed to exercise power.

"Women do need to have power, if we are to be to be acknowledged in the ways described. We do not need to retreat when there is a potential for conflict, but to acquire the skills to be able to astutely manage conflict, as a method to ensure that we gain the power necessary, to achieve all that "our human rights" demand". (Evette Burke-Douglas)

Still other participants proposed alternative views about power.

"To me the word empowerment represents self discovery. For every individual irrespective of gender to participate actively within his or her domain, he or she must acknowledge his or her strengths and weaknesses. To me, I believe the issue of women/girls empowerment has to come from self. An example; a woman who is educated and placed in a leadership role for policy making cannot carry out her functions successfully if she is yet to be self empowered, she has got to understand herself & others, her role, her importance to the post and how to make good decisions. Then only can she fulfil her functions. Self-empowerment also brings about leadership traits."(Vivian Ike)

"With respect, the word "empowerment" conveys positive concepts as opposed to negative notions. The Oxford Concise dictionary provides several usages of the word. A significant one is, to "make able". So essentially, we see education as a means of making women and girls able to manage their affairs, their families or relative and their personal state." (Patricia DeGuire, Ontario)

Others pointed out that the concept was clearly misunderstood and poorly applied.

"The problem with the professionals who are working in the field is that they take it as a "Necklace" that can be given to any person and declare him/her empowered. We all will agree that empowerment is a process of identifying the right beads (skills) that are needed to be woven together to form the necklace.

"The problem of understanding empowerment amongst development professionals is the lack of implementation due to the fear of going into the oblivion. Due to this fear we help or I should say select the beads of the necklace for the people and put them around their neck like a dog collar and declare empowerment."(Pramod Sharma)

"Evette Burke-Douglas rightly warns that 'wishing it away does not change the facts. Until women are comfortable, or at least are not rendered uncomfortable and incapacitated by power, we will remain unable to seek and use power appropriately, or respond reasonably to it either within ourselves or as it is directed toward us by others. And we do need power!! It is the thing that women most need today - power to use our gifts and talents; power to educate and be educated in whatever way we choose; power to change or remain the same; power to say no or yes; power to choose our life paths, foods, religions, husbands, careers, fashions and hairstyles, friends and neighbours, gynecologists; power to make our own decisions, power to spend the money we earn, (or not) and on and on. Power to heal ourselves".

"I fully agree with Oxaal and Baden, that empowerment must involve not only the ability to make choices, but must enable women also to decide which choices are available. And this is where education plays the biggest role. Clearly, education and empowerment go hand in hand. The broader our definitions of education, the broader will be our practices of power." (Shirley Osborne)

4.4 *What kind of education for female empowerment?*

Participants also debated the issue of education as a tool for empowerment, not only defining the term empowerment but also questioning the type and quality of education necessary for female empowerment. Can economic empowerment without social empowerment be considered empowerment? The Kerala model is cited as an example.

> *"The uniqueness of the 'Kerala model lies in the high level of social development achieved despite a low per capita income. One widely acclaimed characteristic of the 'model' is the empowerment of women, which may be correlated to the 100 % literacy that the state achieved a decade ago. However, I would like to argue that in Kerala women empowerment is restricted to economic empowerment alone (even this is doubtful if one takes the real meaning of the term) and not social empowerment. This implies that, as a result of widespread education women were able to obtain jobs and hence earn income, but her control over the income she earns, her status in society as an individual, her role in decision making even at the household level etc are weak. This puts at stake the correlation between education and empowerment."(Chacko Jose, Director Center for Research in society, Kerala, India)*

Weaknesses in the role of some women's only institutions can be significant.

> *"Perhaps what is wrong with the whole system is that what we offer now is 'women's education' and not 'education for women. Only when the system starts offering 'education for women' can it help to empower women 'socially and economically". (Chacko Jose, Kerala, India)*

4.5 *Gender roles and stereotypes*

Many participants pointed out that the type of education a girl or woman obtains is often determined or dictated by society playing on gender roles and stereotypes.

> *"People around you will be kind enough to give you suggestions, most of the teacher's \families\friends will suggest that as a girl it is enough to get the Master's Degree, saying, ' It is hard for a female doctor to find a husband'; or. 'It's hard for a female doctor to find a job'" They also say, It's better to find a good husband rather than a good job." (Tu Liya)*

Gender streaming and gender stereotypes in education mean that there are fewer women represented in major science and technology courses. There is also a preference for male enrolment in these courses. As a result the few women who take these courses find themselves in a minority with no role models and are sometimes discriminated against.

> *"In terms of horizontal stratification, woman in university studies are concentrated in certain careers (social sciences, health disciplines). On the*

contrary their presence in math's, physical sciences and engineering studies decreases significantly.

"In terms of vertical stratification, in science and technology for example, women's participation decreases as the level of decision-making increases even in countries where female participation in the sciences is close to 50%. In Argentina, for example, women make up 62% of university personnel in the lower academic levels, but less than 30 % at the highest category. Agencies promoting science and the university's administrative staff have even less representation of women inside their evaluation organs and political structures". 'Maria Elina Estebañez Researcher, Centro de Estudios sobre Ciencia, Desarrollo y Educación Superior (Redes), Buenos Aires, Argentina)

"The socialization of gender has prominently separated the two genders, some majors are full of girls. One of my friends told me that there are only three girls studying for the Doctor's degree in science in his department, and only one girl in his lab, and that's made a great imbalance. I'm not denying the importance of education, I myself have studied in this area, but the' massification' of high school education does not bring what we expect for the women and girls. Being constrained firmly with the notions, learning styles, job vacancy offers' bias, and gender solidification, we still got a long way to go, girl!" (Tu Liya)

"At national level we have recorded achievements as awareness to encourage female empowerment is almost an anthem. The challenge however lies in the need for the political will to challenge stereotype education patterns, which are "more culturally acceptable". (Gloria Okolugbo, Centre Co-ordinator Centre, for Strategic Research, Abuja, Nigeria)

"Finally, let me repeat that education need not be formal and it need not be to achieve a doctorate degree or to become a doctor. Not every woman or every girl in the world requires the same degree of education to ameliorate her situation, whatever it is. But every woman and every girl needs education, formal or informal, to live". (Patricia deGuire, Ontario, Canada)

"Education as a means of improving one's life ought not to be viewed as an alternative to a good husband or a good job. I have seen very successful marriages and families with both: good husband and good wife with a good job (judge, lawyer, principal, professor and medical doctors including specialists). I have also seen families (marriages) with good jobs and not good or very bad mothers or fathers. Often, these women with very high education, very good jobs and good husbands are very active in their communities and professional organisations. What they have done is, they have navigated a work-life balance.

"Education is a tool, not a master; it is a means to an end. So it can be tailored for the goals we set. Doing so ought to, (to some extent) bring what we need to

achieve amelioration for women and girls. Indeed it is not easy. But it is attainable." (Patricia DeGuire; Canada)

Participants pointed out that if these difficulties exist, it is partly because education systems have not been adapted to current development thinking with respect to gender equity and equality, market needs and resource availability.

"Besides important differences between regions and countries there is a general crisis in education and reforms that have not achieved very positive results. The quality of education in and for today's society, the organization of the educational system, the relation between formal and non formal education, the use of ICT in education, the relation of education with labour, with development, with citizen participation and democracy, all these aspects among many others are in the centre of the discussion. I believe that this attitude or practice can do more for gender equality and education than adding some pieces of gender in an " old vase". (Gloria Bonder, Argentina)

"I am afraid education (especially formal) is overemphasized because people see money in it. This tempts people to extrapolate the American / Western pattern regardless of the vast difference in the socio-economic context. Promoting women in science and technology studies in universities is a prominent example. It is simply assumed that women must be encouraged to study these fields. A deconstruction exercise is required before we swallow this. Who would gain, at whose cost, who can afford it, for which goal & what action, what are the alternatives etc. This would lead to observations highly inconvenient to the elites who dominate the exchange. Squandering scarce resources on equal, higher/ exotic [education] means a lost opportunity to make several thousands of women literate. That is irresponsible misuse of taxpayers/government money. The task could well be left to private employers if we think that it is in their interest. Social goals should be guided by (Mahatma) Gandhi's call for thinking about the poorest. We should have faith in the elites ability to pursue their interests. If intervention & inefficiency are to be incurred it can only be for the sake of the poor." (Sharadchandra Jog, Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai, India)

On the other hand the dilemma of reconciling education and culture still exist.

"In all of these discussions, the question that persists in my mind is how to empower women and girls through education without sacrificing deeply rooted aspects of their culture. As an English as a Second Language teacher to adult immigrants in the U.S., I work with many students who must balance values and norms of their culture and those of the dominant U.S. (including values projected through the education system). The challenge for educators is to bridge scripted demands of education systems with education that encourages girls and women to reflect on and shape their realities on their own terms." (Liv Thorstensson, North Carolina, U.S.)

4.6 *The role of women in fulfilling the right to education?*

Many participants were conscious of the important role women play in promoting female education. Women do not live in isolation but are formed by the cultural norms and values promoted in society. As a result they are likely to transmit the same negative attitudes and stereotypes seen in society. Women have a responsibility to themselves as well to be the vehicle for transforming society's prejudices towards women.

> *"We need female leaders with initiative, vision and insight. We need leaders with the political fortitude to invest real money in the development of women and girls; without strings attached. We need to sustain those parts of our culture that help to sustain our identities and we need to debunk those cultural norms that prevent growth; that sustain oppression; that sustains the superiority of maleness. Not surprisingly, many so-called cultural practices, e.g., polygamy, very early marriage, female circumcision, the prohibition of educating girls beyond certain age, division of domesticity, are rich fodder for sustaining male domination of females. These are means of power and control. Invariably, they result in female stagnation.*

> *"A few years ago, in presenting at an international conference on "Domestic Violence Across Borders" one "educated" woman opined that if her man did not beat her, she did not believe he loved her. Another told me the females were not permitted to inherit family property, but she had no problems with that because the man is the head of the household."*

> *"I have observed households where girls have domestic chores, boys do not. Or if boys have chores, they are manly: shovel the snow or mow the lawn. Or mothers pick up after the boys and tell the girls they are messy. The boys get allowances; girls do not or they get less than the boys'. These may seem trivial, but life is about nurturing and nature; one lives what one learns." (Partricia Deguire, Canada)*

Yet there are positive developments to point out, too.

> *"I listen with glee to successes of women in India and [in] African countries, that are taking proactive steps towards economic empowerment by setting up female-only banks and businesses, establishing communes where women cultivate crops for local consumption and trade, and planting trees towards sustaining the environment. By doing so, they contribute not only to their own sustenance, but also to the environment. That is empowerment. Sometimes I think we need similar programmes in Canada and the US to infuse economic empowerment in women. Many women-of-colour often lament that while we have social empowerment, we have no economic empowerment despite our boast of Multiculturalism." (Patricia Deguire, Canada)*

4.7 *Racial and ethnic disparities within female education*

Women are not a homogenous group, representing socio-economic, class, and racial and ethnic differences. These differences also determine their access to education and the quality of education they receive.

> *"In some countries with important ethnical diversity, statistics on the situation of university women in the sciences only reflects urban white woman. In addition economic and cultural barriers inhibit access to this kind of education and jobs for these communities. This is the case for the population of African-descendents in Brazil and the aborigines of Guatemala.*
>
> *"In other words, it is not only important to get more women in better educational positions for access to power. It is also important –perhaps largely important- to change the ideological frame of our culture" (Maria Elina Estebañez,, Argentina)*

4.8 *Education for empowerment in conflict situations*

Participants also noted the need to empower women with education even in situations of conflict and emergencies.

> *'Graca Machel (1996) stresses the importance of education for all children in times of conflict; "education gives shape and structure to children's lives. When everything around is chaos, schools can be a haven of security that is vital to the well-being of war-affected children and their communities." She also points out that this is especially important for girls: "Education, especially literacy and numeracy, is precisely what girls need during and after armed conflict. Education can help prepare adolescent girls for the new roles and responsibilities that they are often obliged to take on in conflict situations". Coping with conflict in its different stages and forms requires - in addition to basic literacy and numeracy - new information and skills, as does living in the inevitably changed economies and communities of post-conflict times. Girls need information and experiences, which will, as far as possible, protect them from the impacts of the conflict, and will strengthen their own resilience to it. They need, for example, life-saving information on HIV/AIDS, on reproductive health, but they also need to learn self-confidence, communication and negotiation strategies that will empower them to resist sexual exploitation, and to know what to do if it happens.' (Jackie Kirk, University of Ulster)*

5.0 Concluding Remarks

The Online Discussion participants generally confirmed that progress has been made in promoting female education and training over recent years, largely as a result of intensive advocacy from a multitude of actors. However, there is also a strong conviction that a great deal still needs to be done. Obstacles to female education remain a reality in many countries, and impair women and girls from fully enjoying the right to education and the associated benefits to all other rights. The challenges to female education are many and extend beyond the education system into society as a whole. As a result long-term solutions to educating women must also address societal attitudes and behaviour; hence, the need for the education system to form close linkages with society and be informed by it. The education system can no longer operate in isolation but must integrate and reflect society's needs and be the medium for transforming society so that women and men can enjoy equal rights.

Four general areas for action can be identified as a result of the on-line discussion. The first need is to provide education *for* women, and not 'women's education'. This will require an expansive view of education to include, information and technology, building a human resource capacity for the labour market, democracy and sustainable development. It will require changes in the preparation and planning of education policies and plans to include the needs of diverse groups and cultures in order to ensure equality of opportunity for all citizens. Girls and women's needs must be integrated into the planning process and form part of the analysis of every education plan and policy. Female education and gender issues must not be treated as an ad on or be the responsibility of a separate unit without financial and political power.

Second, there is a need to rethink education policies and programmes in order to identify new and innovative methods of providing education for women in difficult circumstances. Current methods and practices of educating girls and women have not been fully successful in reducing the number of women without education, particularly poor and rural women. This will require taking education to women, planning education to suit women's needs and using different forms and medium of education. The education system should strive to provide quality education for women in today's knowledge economy.

Third, education financing, policy and curriculum content and its relevance to the individual must be re-examined to ensure female education and training. Education should be a tool for empowering women by providing them with a variety of choices, and the ability to make those choices that best suit their needs. Female education and training is not just a question of access and numbers, but extends to the issue of the quality of education received, the purpose of the education and its usefulness to the individual and to society at large

Finally, the success of female education and training requires leadership and commitment from all levels of society and the international community. The government may have the primary responsibility for education but every individual has a role to play and a contribution to make in order that female education becomes a reality.