

Preliminary conclusions of online discussion

Gender Equality, Education and Training

Organized by UNESCO

10 January – 7 February 2010

The discussion on "Gender Equality, Education and Training" was part of a series of United Nations online discussions dedicated to the fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000); and was coordinated by WomenWatch, an inter-agency project of the United Nations Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and an unique electronic gateway to web-based information on all United Nations entities' work and the outcomes of the United Nations' intergovernmental processes for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. For more information and other "Beijing at 15" online discussions, visit <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/beijing15/>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this report reflect the opinions of participants to the online discussion and not the official views of the United Nations

**Beijing Platform for Action,
Strategic Objective B**

**“Gender Equality, Education and Training”
Online Discussion**

(10 January – 7 February 2010)

Preliminary Conclusions

**UNESCO Division for Gender Equality
of the Bureau of Strategic Planning**

Background

- Discussion was one of a series of online discussions organized by the United Nations' Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE).
- The online discussions each focus on one of the Strategic Objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action.
- UNESCO was asked to lead the online discussion on Strategic Objective B of the Beijing Platform, "Education and Training of Women" from 10 January to 7 February 2010.

Strategic Objective B

- Ensure equal access to education,
- Eradicate illiteracy among women,
- Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education,
- Develop non-discriminatory education and training,
- Allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms,
- Promote life-long education and training for girls and women.

Participation

- 457 women and men took part in the discussion.
- 18,6% men and 81,4% women
- Participants in majority above 36 yrs of age (74%)

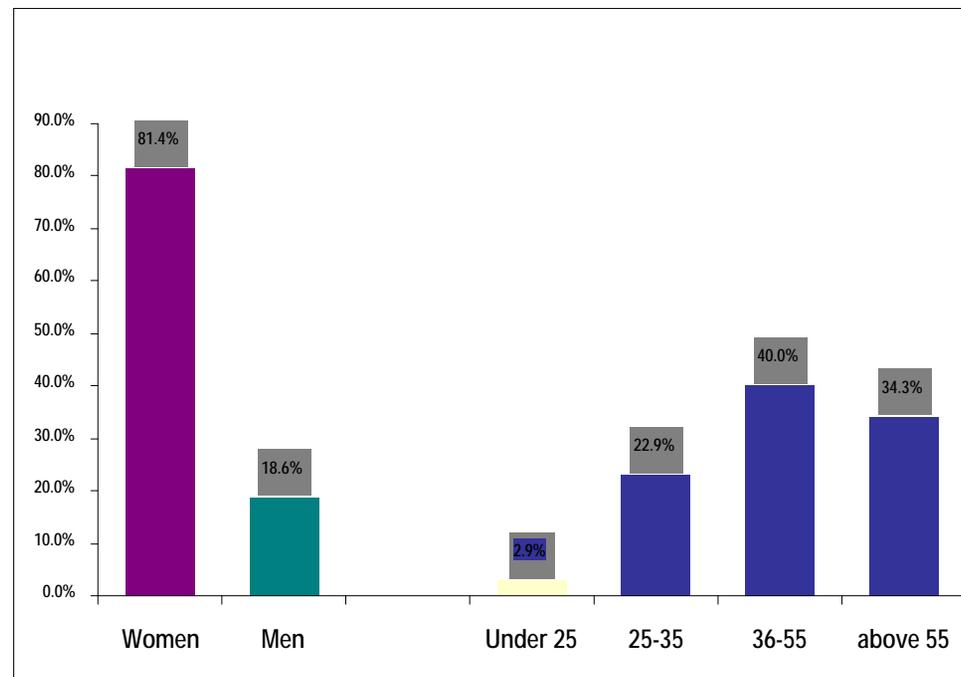


Fig. 1: Participants by Gender and Age

Participation

- Diverse professional profiles: people working in the field for CBOs/NGOs (national and international); high & middle ranking officials from ministries of education; heads of UN country education programmes ; members of UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) network (bilateral development agencies) ; IGOs; academics & students ; private institutions

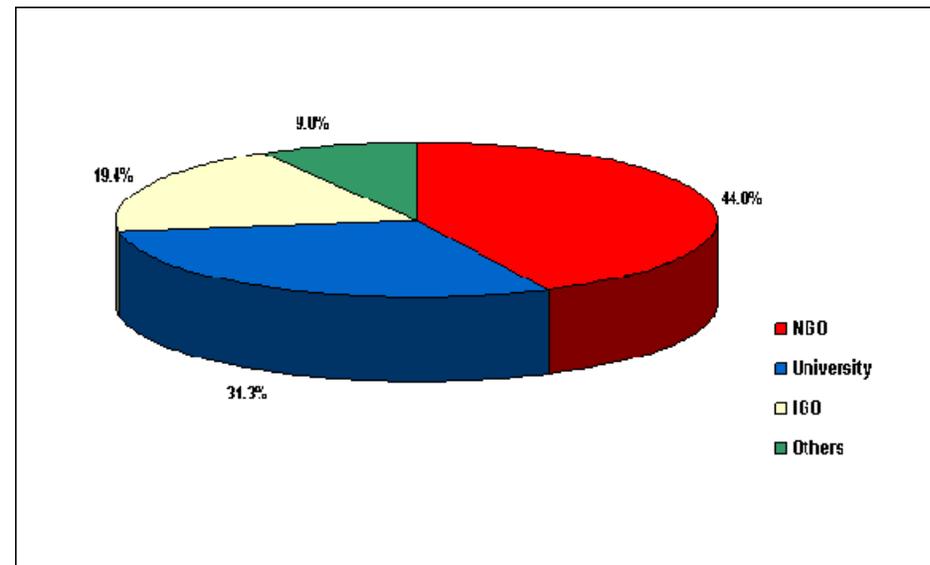
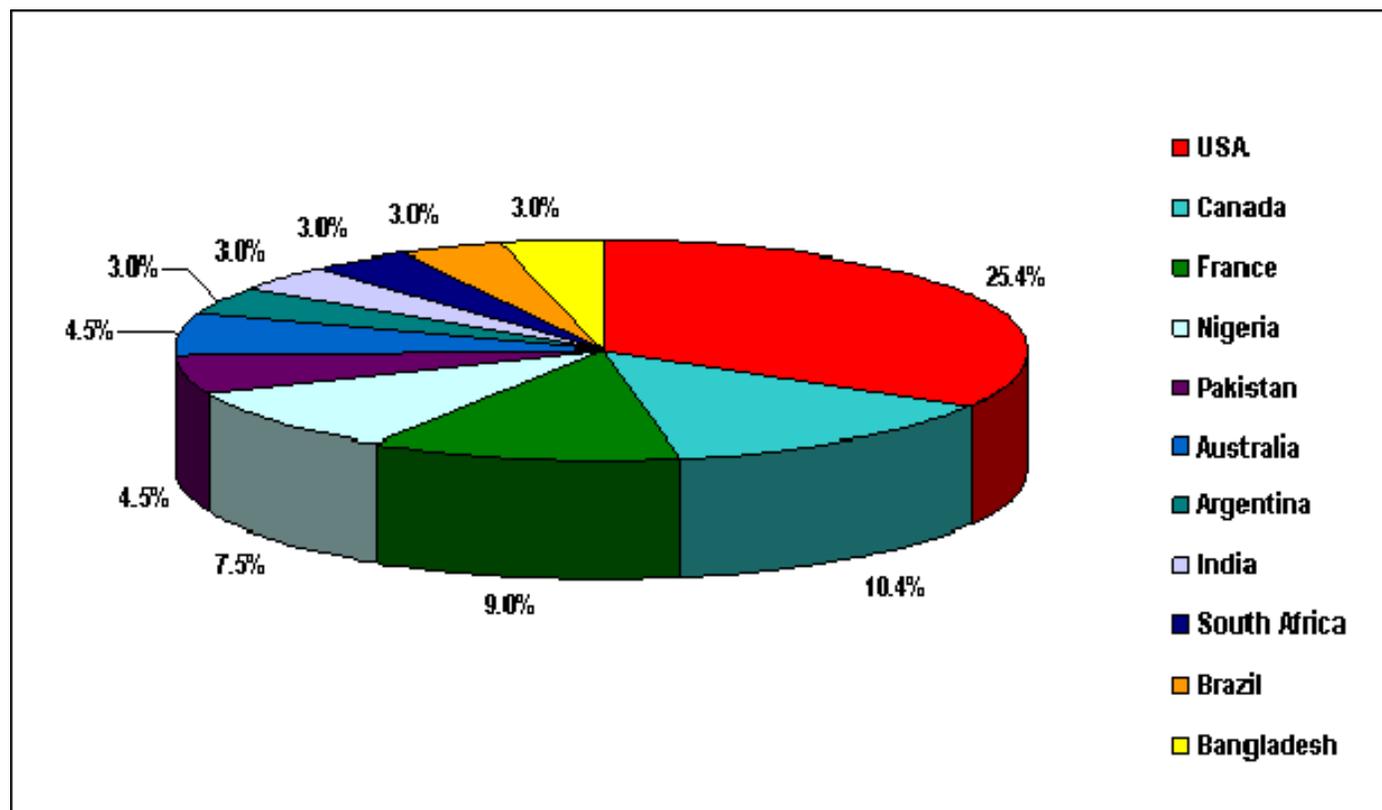


Figure 2: Professional profiles of participants

Participation

- 360 **Facebook** fans and 111 **Twitter** followers
- Participants from all regions - 70 countries



Contributions

- Testimonies
- Presentations of ongoing initiatives (NGOs, Governments) and good practices
- Opinions and analyses
- Submission of reports and studies
- Requests for advice and assistance

Contributions

Papers prepared for the online discussion:

1. Elaine Unterhalter, Amy North and Jenny Parkes (Institute for Education), “*Gender Equality and Women and Girls’ Education, 1995-2010: How much is there a space for hope?*”
2. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), “*Ensuring Equitable Lifelong Learning Opportunities*”, based on National Reports feeding into the Global Report on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI); Dec 2009.
3. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), “*Gender Disaggregated Key Education Indicators since Beijing 1995*”
4. Global Monitoring Report Team, “*Gender Overview of the 2010 Global Monitoring Report : Reaching the Marginalized*”
5. Plan International

Themes of Discussion

Opportunity to look at *achievements, gaps* and *challenges*.

- **Week 1:** Disconnects: missed opportunities for progress and lessons learned
- **Week 2:** Silences and hidden challenges
- **Week 3:** Crises: challenges and new opportunities
- **Week 4:** Key messages

Week One: « Disconnections: Missed opportunities for progress and lessons learned »

- Disconnections between policy **discourse** at international (EFA, CEDAW-art 10) and national levels and **implementation**. Policy commitment to gender mainstreaming but little evidence of large scale programmes supporting claim (nb: literacy).
- Disconnections between **national commitments and local needs/action**. Policies not implemented on the ground due to poor communication between stakeholders, insufficient resources and lack of coordinated action.
- Need to look beyond gender parity in basic education. Exclusive focus on EFA Goals & MDG leads to deprioritization of access to higher levels of ED and insufficient attention to the development of quality empowering education (formal & non-formal)

Week One: « Disconnections: Missed opportunities for progress and lessons learned » ...cont'

- Losing the holistic vision of education in Beijing PFA that is a true catalyst for change
- **Pedagogical materials** that perpetuate restricted female social roles and out of date teaching practices were two key areas that participants identified as lagging behind international frameworks and research.(industrialized and developing nations)
- How do we tackle **cultural resistance** to the education of women which prevents many from either accessing or completing education?

Week Two: « Silences and hidden challenges »

- Chronic underreporting, fear of speaking out and « silences » in data on **gender-based violence** in and around schools is perpetuating gender inequalities and contributing to girls' low confidence and high drop out rates. (boys and girls are victims; industrialized and dev nations) → responses require community based approach, I&E campaigns targeting girls and boys. All age groups.
- Education initiatives not responding to complex needs of women suffering from compounded forms of discrimination. **Ethnic and minority women:** programmes and policies need to take account **special learning needs** and specific challenges.
- **Mother-tongue language:** bi-lingual educational materials and teaching methods should be promoted by governments.

Week Two: « Silences and hidden challenges »

- **Teen pregnancy and early marriage:** a challenge to have girls re-integrated into education. Reports of schools refusing entry despite national policy encouraging re-entry. Insufficient research available & circulating
- **HIV & AIDS preventive education** emerged since Beijing..needs to be tied to sexuality education /SRH information
- Greater government investments in **life long learning** needed to give out of schoold girls/young women and older women chance to keep on learning outside of formal structures.
- Need to reinforce **regional level agenda setting**; coordination.

Week Three: « Crises and new opportunities »

- Strong concern for the negative impact of the financial crisis on education funding. **Maintaining aid commitments** seen as especially critical in period of crisis due to the **social protection** education offers. Common held belief that financial crisis may reverse gains.
- **What kind of education?** Nonformal education should be promoted since it allows women, excluded from formal education, to keep on learning and building skills in critical areas such as health, ICT and entrepreneurial/business. Emphasis on diversifying forms of education/delivery mechanisms to ensure continuous adult education

Week Three: « Crises and new opportunities »

- Policy and programmes should ensure that **quality nonformal education** can provide a bridge to the formal system through equivalency programmes.
- In context of crisis, education is critical to ensure women's participation in development/reconstruction as active and full citizens (citizenship)
- More interventions to provide women with the necessary skills to deal with **effects of climate change**.

Week Four: « 5 key messages for decision makers and governments »

- A strong consensus that **greater opportunities for participation** by grassroots organization in national policy development were required in order to translate commitments into effective local action and coordinate implementation;
- Governments need to be more **accountable and transparent**, allocate more resources and train more teachers, esp. in rural areas.(role of civil society impt to hold Governments accountable)
- Governments need to consider wider context of gender inequality
- Gender equality can only be achieved through holistic approach that **includes boys and men** in all interventions.
- Media, pedagogical materials and cultural traditions that perpetuate stereotypes of « feminine » subjects and professions need to be reformed in order to reflect more progressive social roles for women.
- Training programmes need to better equip women to face and surmount crises.

Beijing + 20? Lessons learnt and analysis

- General frustration with persisting gender stereotypes and so-called cultural barriers; fear of the “educated woman”
- Feeling of regression in terms of the vision.
- Actions to advance the Beijing agenda have been fragmented, poorly coordinated and not always sustained. Incapacity to go to scale.
- The level of exchange reflects a need – and a desire – for more partnerships and complementary actions between NGOs, different levels of Government and international institutions; Strong sense of isolation from policy-making arenas

Beijing + 20? Lessons learnt and analysis

- Achieving gender equality in education requires social transformations in all spheres of public and private life: eg. media, popular culture, cultural traditions, employment opportunities
- A reconceptualization of education is needed to include questions on: how to diversify education to respond to the needs of women unable to access formal learning, how we ensure that education filters through to all spheres of life; and developing non-formal institutions that cater for the life long learning needs of women.
- Knowledge gaps need to be filled regarding adult education (participation); marginalized girls/women; early pregnancy and education practices; gender –based violence; levels of education and social outcomes. Guidance and counselling; effectiveness of gender budgets in education

Follow-Up: « Transformative policies and initiatives: promoting gender equality in all spheres of life »

- During the discussion numerous participants expressed the wish to see the discussion prolonged, valuing the occasion to share and collaborate with colleagues from all horizons and backgrounds.
- A participant's survey confirmed that participants wanted the online discussion to continue. A strong majority (95.6%) of all respondents to the survey expressed their enthusiasm for a prolongation.
- We will prolong the online discussion until the **High-level Event by the United Nations General Assembly** on the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals in September 2010.
- The online discussion will broaden its focus to look at transformative policies, practices and initiatives that promote gender equality in all spheres of life.

<http://www.unesco.org/genderequality>

For more information, please visit UNESCO's
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