Gender Consultation Report:
Key Findings for the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity

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the Education Commission

UNGEI United Nations Girls' Education Initiative

I. Introduction

This report provides key findings and recommendations from the Gender Consultation co-hosted by the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) and the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity. The aim of the Gender Consultation was to identify key gender issues in education that are critical to consider in financing education. The Consultation included a virtual survey with partner organizations across the UNGEI network, as well as a moderated panel of experts and a face to face discussion during the 60th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW60) co-hosted with the Government of Norway, Education International and UNICEF. The survey and discussion sought to capture the ideas and concerns of representatives from NGOs, multilateral institutions, government, youth organizations, teach trade unions, and school boards.

In July 2015, Malala Yousafzai spoke to world leaders during the Oslo Summit on Education for Development hosted by the Government of Norway. "We must take action this year in 2015. We must finance our future now," Malala argued. "The issue is not that there is not enough money. The issue is the lack of commitment of our world leaders to invest in education." In 2015, world leaders responded by launching the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity to develop a renewed and compelling investment case and financial pathway for achieving equal educational opportunities for children and young people. With a particular focus on the mobilization of new partnerships to achieve these aims, the Commission partnered with UNGEI to consult on the gender issues in financing equitable education.

"If we are to meet our ambitious post-2015 sustainable development agenda and reach a 50:50 Planet by 2030,' writes Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director UN Women, "we need transformative financing for gender equality and women's empowerment that is unprecedented both in scale and scope, from all sources and at all levels. We must ensure that gender equality commitments translate into better financing and increased investments that enable women and girls around the world to live a life of dignity and realize their full potential." The Commission provided a welcome opportunity for the gender and education community to understand the key issues relating to 'better' and 'transformative' financing which are needed to achieve our commitments to gender equality in education.

II. Thematic Focus

The Consultation covered key issues related to the cost of gender inequality at different levels (national, community, family), and the cost of addressing gender issues in education through services. It also inquired about priorities in investment to achieve gender outcomes in education, as well as other inputs that would help build the investment case for girls' education and gender equality. Specifically, the areas of focus included obstacles to action on girls' education, critical factors in successful interventions, the role of different stakeholders in financing girls' education, high-yield investment strategies, and additional gender considerations in educational access and achievement. The four key questions guiding the Consultation were as follows:

1. Given the clear benefits of girls' education, why do you think there has not been action and investment at the level needed in proven practices and strategies to improve education quality and outcomes for girls?
2. What costs are the greatest obstacles to educating girls? What key strategies are most needed to ensure equal access to free quality education for girls and boys?

3. Given the financial constraints, how can we make better use of financing? How can limited resources be allocated to ensure that all girls benefit?
4. What additional gender considerations need to be taken into account by the Commission?

III. Key Findings

The following key findings emerged from the Consultation for the Commission to consider in addressing gender in education financing:

Barriers to Investment

- **Lack of political will remains a critical obstacle to investment and action to advance girls' education**. The Consultation found that global momentum around girls' education has not sufficiently translated into increased national budgets and donor aid for education targeting girls' education and gender equality. Without sufficient political will at these levels, there is inadequate financial investment in gender outcomes. It was agreed that sufficient resources exist globally to close the education gap, and that the Commission must unequivocally demand the redistribution of aid and national budgets in favor of financing education. Special efforts will be needed to ensure that education budgets take gender considerations into account.

> ***"Lack of Political Will"*** was identified as the greatest obstacle to action on girls' education by 75% of the virtual survey respondents.

    - Additionally, governments are not well equipped with systems of accountability, planning and budgeting to ensure that commitments to girls' education and gender equality were financed, implemented and monitored. It was noted that engagement of Ministries of Finance as well as the Ministries of Education is crucial for gender-responsive planning and budgeting in education to become a reality.

    - One third of the virtual survey respondents also identified as an obstacle "lack of technical capacity" necessary to realize commitments to girls' education. Limited knowledge about what constitutes gender equality and which investments yield the highest returns for girls' education restrict financing.

- **Gender-bias remains a major obstacle for financing and achieving results.** Across the Consultation, participants identified gender bias and social norms that undervalue girls and women to be major obstacles to action and investment in girls' education. Where girls are not seen to be inherently valuable to the well-being of society, financing for girls' education was inconsistent or limited to investments that ensure their ability to fulfill socially sanctioned roles.

Cost Barriers

- **At the household level, the most important cost barrier affecting girls' education relates to the household labor**. Over and above the outlay of cash to attend and participate in school, including the direct costs of fees, transportation, school materials, meals, and uniforms, 68% of survey participants noted that family labor needs are the most significant cost barrier to girls' education. This was linked to the multi-dimensional nature of the cost barriers. Poverty is the overarching barrier to girls continuing in school through secondary level. Financing through targeted education and/or other social protection programs can alleviate a family's dependence on adolescent girls for labor and overcome the need to resort to alternatives for girls such as child marriage.

> ***"Family Labor Needs"*** was identified as the greatest cost barrier to girls' education by 68% of the virtual survey respondents.

Investment Strategies: System-Wide and Targeted

The survey and discussions highlighted the need for investment in building gender responsive education systems as well as targeted interventions that lead to better and transformative results.

- **Investing in gender responsive systems will ensure schools respond to the needs of girls and boys.** Across the network and during the CSW Consultation, participants spoke out in favour of interventions that strengthened national public systems to provide quality and equity-focused education and respond to gender issues in the country context. This would mean integrating gender considerations across all processes and structures: education budgets, plans and policies, procurement strategies, human resource development approaches, data collection tools and monitoring methods.

- **Reducing family costs can ensure free education for all.** Reducing and eliminating direct and indirect costs including school fees, all administrative costs and school based contributions was considered key to especially at the secondary level. Prohibitive costs for education continue to force families to choose between sons and daughters, with girls often losing out. Evidence has shown the strategies to enable girls and families to cover costs such as subsidies, scholarships, and stipends are effective. Engaging families, particularly mothers, in income generating activities and parent savings groups were also proposed as solutions.

- **Making schools accessible and gender-responsive can improve access and promote an enabling environment for girls.** Participants emphasized the need to make schools more accessible and responsive to girls' needs through investments in infrastructure, curricula, and the school environment. The responses indicated that this can be done by building schools closer to communities and providing quality boarding facilities for girls, safe and affordable transportation, and clean and safe toilets. Other strategies included employing female teachers and training teachers; ensuring the curriculum is gender-sensitive; preventing school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV); and integrating life skills and mentorship programs. Online education and other flexible and alternative models of schooling were also identified as potential strategies to reach girls and boys who cannot access mainstream education.

- **Building community awareness on girls' education remains a critical area for investment.** In the virtual survey over a third of the responses referenced working with communities, and families as a prerequisite for change. Programs focusing on changing social norms in regard to child marriage, gender based violence and child labour through media, advocacy and community engagement were recommended. Promoting community champions for girls' education, engaging religious leaders, explicitly addressing issues of boys' disadvantage, including men and boys in discussions of girls' education and investing in girls' own attitudes toward the value of education through mentors and role models were seen to be valuable investments bearing positive gender outcomes.

IV. Key Recommendations

1. **Galvanize attention to the funding gap in education** in order to raise more money for education overall. Increase investment in strong education systems by increasing the national budget for education, enlarging the tax base, and securing new sources for education funding, including the private sector as well as donor assistance.

2. **Build gender responsive education systems based on an understanding of the specific gender needs in the country and include interventions with proven gender outcomes** such as teacher support and training and the elimination of direct costs to families**.**

> ***If you measure political will by talk, political will for girls' education does not seem to be a barrier. If you measure it by following the money—then you see that it is.***
>
> ***CSW Panel Discussion***

3. **Establish and lead a research agenda** that provides evidence for "how to spend the money better" in order to achieve gender outcomes. Investors and planners alike need to understand which interventions are most cost-effective to overcome gender barriers and ensure equitable access, participation and learning. Promoting the collection and use of disaggregated data for planning and budgeting is key, as is the collection and exchange of evidence and experience across different contexts and by different actors.

4. **Invest in targeted interventions to address prevailing gender bias** in schools, communities and countries. Cost, budget and allocate human and financial resources to make schools more accessible and responsive to girls' needs, and engage the community in challenging gender-based constraints including attitudes, social norms, and gender-based violence in school. Specific focus on adolescent girls is key. Providing comprehensive sexuality education and access to youth-friendly reproductive health services through schools is critical to address the serious issue of early pregnancy and the increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS among adolescent girls. Early pregnancy has become an education issue requiring budgeted education responses through policy, curriculum, teacher training and alternative learning programs.

5. **Do not rely only on the education sector alone for gender outcomes**. Investments in health, child protection, and the rights and participation of women are linked to more gender equitable systems and girls remaining in school through secondary. Girls' education is linked to a wide range of development outcomes. A comprehensive case for investment in girls' education must capture what

is known about benefits beyond education achieved through investing in girls in areas such as health, employment, women's empowerment and climate change.

6. **Allocate education dollars equitably; implement equity-based policies to reach the most marginalized girls.** Gender disadvantage is most extreme in poor families, among girls in conflict, girls with disability and girls in remote and indigenous communities. Education financing must target the most marginalized girls. Effective and equitable allocation will require strong evidence and better data. Context-specific gender analyses can help identify who the most marginalized girls are and the particular barriers that they face, as well as cost-effective policies and interventions.

7. **Adopt language of gender equality in education.** Education 2030 recognized the importance of gender equality in achieving the right to education for all. It states that 'achieving gender equality requires a rights-based approach that ensures that girls and boys, women and men not only gain access to and complete education cycles, but are empowered equally in and through education' (UNESCO 2015). This requires that at national and global levels research and policy discussions focus on the education needs of girls and boys, men and women; and not limit the discussion of gender disparity to girls and women alone. For example, a reverse gender gap in numerous Latin American contexts, with more girls than boys enrolling in school, demonstrates the ways strict male gender norms linking masculinity and economic earning potential can cause boys to drop out of school to participate in child labor. Sexual minorities should also be taken into account when considering gender issues in education.

V. Areas for Further Analysis

Other compelling gender and education considerations that arose in the Consultation but which require further analysis include:

Quantifying the costs of gender bias in education, including:

- school-related gender-based violence
- entrenched attitudes towards educating girls
- poorly trained and paid teachers
- gender bias and stereotypes in textbooks and curricula

A. **Understanding gender costs in education**. The Consultation identified a lack of data on the cost of gender disparities in education, both the cost to individuals, families, the community, businesses and the government of a given problem, and the cost of services to take action to address gender disparities. Collecting this data can support a strong financial case for investing in gender-equitable education interventions. For example, a recent study by RTI found that bullying, one form of SRGBV, can cost low and middle income countries up to $17 billion annually.[1]By defining and understanding gender costs in education, a financial case for investments that reduce or eliminate gender gaps in education can be developed.

B. **Understanding the costs and benefits of private sector involvement in education.** The Consultation found diverse opinions on the issues of private sector involvement in education. Private schools can lower education costs at the point of entry for some children, sometimes opening new opportunities for girls, however these schools were identified as lacking accountability and may be of lower quality. In some locations, low cost private schools employ women teachers at submarket rates. Yet, in situations

[1] RTI International. 2015. *What is the Cost of School-Related Gender-Based Violence?* Washington, DC: U.S. Agency for International Development.

where the system is weak, private sector involvement can fill a gap. Further understanding of the gender dimensions of private sector engagement in education is needed to identify new financing partners while ensuring full attention to the gender outcomes of these investments.