State of girls’ education in Africa:
Achievements since 2000, challenges and prospects for the future

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Summary

Progress
The importance of educating girls has been extensively researched and documented. It is enshrined in international commitments, and international and regional attention has led to improvements in some aspects of girls’ education. However, much remains to be done to meet the goals of gender equality that African Governments have committed to in education.

Pre-primary enrolment has increased by 4.6 million across sub-Saharan Africa over the past decade, but enrolment rates remain the lowest in the world with the poorest least able to access it. Rapid increases in enrolment for boys and girls have been seen across the board in primary education, but gender parity in enrolment has not been achieved in most countries and the region as a whole is not on track to achieve UPE by 2015. Across the African region, in 47 of the 54 countries girls have a less than 50% chance of completing primary school. Transition rates from primary to secondary are low for both boys and girls, and most countries remain well below the gender parity line in enrolment in all levels of secondary education (the parity gap has increased since 1999). Once in secondary school, girls are more likely to drop out.

Financial costs remain a huge barrier, and in poor families girls are more likely than boys to miss out on education. Barriers within the school environments include gender based violence, quality and availability of basic facilities, approaches and materials which reinforce discriminatory gendered norms, expectations and behaviours, and formal and informal school policies. Teacher shortages present huge challenges to quality, and the low proportion of female teachers impacts on the protection and aspirations of girls. Constraining sociocultural norms outside of the school are also a major challenge: in terms of domestic labour and caring for family, and early or forced marriage. Early pregnancy amongst primary and secondary school children is widespread, spelling the end to education for girls in many countries.

Policy and advocacy issues
Strategic focus areas for moving forward include access of the most marginalised, transition to post-primary education and improving the quality of education.

Policy priorities include:
- Understanding and responding to the complexity of marginalisation, through increased data on marginalised groups, targeted responses to tackle other factors of marginalisation that intersect with gender (such as poverty, conflict and child labour) and flexible approaches to education.
- Girl-friendly schools and violence, through establishing national policy frameworks for addressing violence; developing/strengthening legislation to eliminate GBV; establishing girl-friendly criteria for schools and assessing implementation; strengthening women’s and girls’ participation in school administration and governance; reviewing curricula and teaching and learning materials for gender sensitivity and gender equality; and increasing the numbers and quality of teachers available, with a particular focus on female teachers.
- Early marriage and early pregnancy, through developing or strengthening national legislation on the prohibition of child marriage, reforming administrative laws on pregnancy, motherhood and education and ensuring the enforcement and monitoring of such legislation; strengthening public awareness campaigns to counter child marriage and early pregnancy; providing support and flexibility for young mothers to balance child care considerations with the continuation of their education; and strengthening sexual and reproductive health education within schools and access to sexual and reproductive health services.

Governments need to be held to account to commit to and implement sufficient, gender-sensitive budget allocations for education. This must include specific allocations for girls’ education, and financing formulas that prioritise need. At international level, civil society has a role to play in keeping girls’ education on the agenda and in donor budgets. Civil society organisations must also act to raise awareness at community level of rights and of government policies, as well as challenge existing or traditional social norms which constrain girls’ access to and achievement in education.

Civil society organisations should work to keep girls education on the agenda in the run up to and beyond 2015 by working collaboratively and ensuring advocacy messages are SMART and strategic.
1. Development of girls’ education

1.1 Policy context

The importance of educating girls has been extensively researched and documented. First and foremost, education is a basic human right enshrined in international commitments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and, at a regional level, the Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child. It is also widely recognised that girls’ education is one of the most effective means of development not only for girls themselves but for communities and wider society. Better girls’ education raises maternal health, reduces child mortality, improves nutrition within the home, and increases the potential workforce and opportunities for economic growth.

Over the past decade or so, the focus on girls’ education has been shaped by a number of key commitments including the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals. Within Africa, the Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006-2015) reflects these commitments with a specific goal: to eliminate gender disparities and ensure gender equality, girls’ and women’s empowerment throughout the education system.\(^1\) In 2008 the Association for the Development of Education in Africa Biennale reinforced this, prioritising the transition of girls from basic to higher levels of education and increasing the percentage of female teachers at post-primary levels. Conferences of education ministers, such as that of ECOWAS in 2004, have prioritised commitments to girls’ education.

Whilst this international and regional attention has led to improvements in some aspects of girls’ education, much remains to be done to meet the goals of gender equality that African Governments have committed to in education, from pre-primary to adult levels.

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1.2 Progress

1.2.1 Pre-primary

The impact of early childhood experiences on subsequent educational and social opportunities and life chances is increasingly recognised for all children, but particularly for girls. A lack of early learning foundations (including birth registration) and poor nutrition at this crucial stage can have far reaching implications for girls’ ability to acquire knowledge and skills and access subsequent education. Girls that participate in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes are better prepared to start primary school, cope better and stay enrolled and attend for longer than girls who do not access ECCE.\(^3\)

Whilst pre-primary enrolment has increased by 4.6 million across sub-Saharan Africa over the past decade, enrolment rates remain the lowest in the world, at just 17%. There is very limited public provision of ECCE in most countries and it is often the poorest, who would benefit the most from ECCE, that are the least able to access it.\(^4\)

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Article 11 (3) African Charter on The Rights And Welfare Of The Child: States Parties … shall in particular:
(a) provide free and compulsory basic education;
(b) encourage the development of secondary education in its different forms and to progressively make it free and accessible to all;
(c) make the higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity and ability by every appropriate means;
d) take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of dropout rates;
e) take special measures in respect of female, gifted and disadvantaged children.
1.2.2 Enrolment in primary

In the primary sector, the last decade has seen very rapid increases in enrolment for both boys and girls with the abolition of school fees in many countries and a strong emphasis on access from the MDG and EFA agendas. Over 46 million children have enrolled in primary education from 1999 to 2008 in sub-Saharan Africa, with the regional net primary enrolment rate for girls moving from 54% in 1999 to 74% in 2008. Despite this progress, there remain 29 million primary-aged children out of school in sub-Saharan Africa, 54% of whom are girls, and the region as a whole is not on track to achieve UPE by 2015.5

In many countries, the abolition of school fees at primary level led to huge and sudden increases in enrolment for girls and boys, including many who were over age. This influx often came at the price of quality, and governments continue to face resource challenges as demand for, and access to, education rises.

The progress also masks huge country variations in girls’ primary enrolment across the region, with leaps in some countries, such as Ethiopia, which has gone from a girls’ net enrolment rate of 30% to 75%, whilst other countries such as Niger and Eritrea remain under 60%. The situation is much worse in conflict affected states which are heavily concentrated amongst those furthest from reaching the EFA goals.

In terms of the ratio of boys to girls in primary education, moderate progress has been made over the past decade towards gender parity (Figure 1). In sub-Saharan Africa only 16 of the 43 countries with adequate data have so far achieved parity, and 17 countries still have a gender parity index under 0.9. The prospects of achieving the target of gender parity by 2015 are therefore low for many countries in the region without further concerted action for girls’ education.6

1.2.3 Completion of primary

Figures on enrolment and parity only go so far, however, in giving us a true picture of the state of girls’ education. They cannot tell us which girls are enrolling, how long they stay in education or what they are learning whilst there.

The gap between girls and boys grows as they progress through their primary education: girls are much less likely to complete primary school. Again, there has been some progress on primary completion rates in most African regions over the last decade, but the huge gap that remains between girls and boys in many countries demonstrates the need to focus on more than just enrolment.

There is a mixed record of progress in improving survival rates and, in sub-Saharan Africa, only 7 in 10 children starting primary school survived to the last grade in 2007. Some countries (such as Chad, Ethiopia, Madagascar and Malawi) have seen their survival rates decline since 1999.7 Across the African region, in 47 of the 54 countries girls actually have a less than 50% chance of completing primary school.8 Conflict has exacerbated this situation in many countries, for example in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in comparison with the national average, adolescents and young adults living in North Kivu province are twice as likely to have less than two years in school which increases to three times as likely for poor females.9

Higher dropout rates, especially for girls, are seen in grade 1 and grades 4 and 5 (Figure 2). Dropout patterns for girls vary across and within countries, with huge disparities between groups and regions, however, primary school dropouts increase with age in many countries.
1.2.4 Transition to secondary

Secondary education is a growing concern for the global community – as access to primary increases, so does demand for secondary – and it represents a critical link between basic education and the labour market or higher education. Secondary school comes at a particularly vulnerable age for girls, as they transition into puberty (and thus child-bearing age) and into an age perceived suitable for work (inside or outside of the home); as such, their chances of staying in school reduce. In addition to the fundamental right to education, there is a strong argument for ensuring girls gain access to quality secondary education due to its positive impacts on girls’ ability to earn more income as adults, marry later, reduce their vulnerability to diseases such as HIV and AIDS and have fewer, healthier children.

However, even for those children who manage to complete primary education, transition rates for both boys and girls remain low at 64% across sub-Saharan Africa, going as low as 26% for girls in Guinea (Figure 3). Across the whole population, overall enrolments in lower secondary education have seen modest progress in the last decade from 28% to 41%, although again, this includes huge national variations. The progress has included an increase in girls’ enrolment in lower secondary from 26% to 36%, but most African countries remain well below the gender parity line (Figure 4). Enrolment rates in secondary school are nearly one-third lower in conflict-affected countries, and girls only account for 30% of refugees enrolled in secondary school.

This can be tracked back to disparities in primary school; in most countries girls who have completed primary education have the same chance as boys of making the transition to secondary education. Once in secondary school, however, girls are more likely to drop out – statistics on completion are not available in most countries, but can be as low as 4% in Niger, and 9% in Burundi. The parity gap has widened across all secondary schooling in sub-Saharan Africa since 1999, but more so at upper secondary, demonstrating that girls are more likely drop out before reaching this level. In sub-Saharan Africa the gender parity index at upper secondary was 0.83 in 1999, and 0.77 in 2008.

1.3 Barriers to girls’ education

Significant barriers still exist in girls’ access to, retention in and transition between different levels of education, particularly relating to the quality of education they receive when in school and discrimination and harmful practices faced by girls both within schools and in their communities.

1.3.1 Financial costs

Direct and indirect costs of education remain one of the most frequently cited barriers to children’s enrolment and retention in education. A number of studies have indicated that national level policies on free education have yet to be fully implemented at local levels, with the continued existence of school fees in countries across sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, indirect costs including uniforms, textbooks, travel costs, supplementing community teacher salaries and school management committee charges continue to make education unaffordable for many families. This has a particular impact on girls, as economically driven decisions for poor families usually favour sending boys to school because of the perceived and real future economic and social benefits. With secondary education costs often 3 to 5 times higher than primary, these financial barriers play an important role in the low transition rates for girls and their withdrawal from education at a crucial stage when it can provide support and personal resources in the face of increasing pressures to engage in sexual activity, to marry, have children or to join the labour market.
1.3.2 School environments and gender-based violence

Education is one of the most effective means through which to protect girls from, and enhance their ability to resist, violence and abuse. Yet studies have indicated that many children, and particularly girls, experience violence within schools from peers and teachers, including physical and sexual abuse, harassment and bullying. In the DRC, 46% of girl students in one survey confirmed being victims of sexual harassment, abuse and violence from their teachers or other school personnel, and research in Niger found 88% of participating teachers confirmed the existence of sexual acts between students and teachers at their school. Violence and the fear of violence in and around schools directly work against girls’ enrolment, participation, completion and achievement.

In many rural areas, long distances from home to school make girls more vulnerable to abuse, and parents often prevent girls from travelling to school because of fears for their safety. This contributes to a low school life expectancy, 1.9 years, for poor, rural girls in sub-Saharan Africa.

The quality of basic school facilities is a further barrier to girls’ attendance and achievement within schools. A lack of separate latrines, poor water and sanitation facilities and unsafe school environments affect both girls and female teachers, with studies indicating non-attendance during menstruation and increased vulnerability to harassment and abuse.

In addition to these physical conditions, the approaches and materials used within the classroom can reinforce discriminatory gendered norms, expectations and behaviours. Ensuring that curricula are relevant and sensitive to both girls’ and boys’ needs, that textbooks and learning materials are gender-sensitive and reflect positive images of girls and women, and that classroom practices proactively engage girls and provide a safe and positive learning environment for both girls and boys are vital components in promoting girl-friendly schools and challenging gendered stereotypes.

School management and formal and informal school policies have been shown to play a significant role in the impact of all of these issues. Discriminatory school policies such as those that actively exclude girls for reasons of pregnancy and motherhood, or the failure to monitor and act on instances of gross misconduct of teachers towards students, are hugely detrimental to both individual girls and the wider school environment.

In areas affected by violent conflict, girls and boys access to education is severely limited. Girls are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence in conflict-affected areas, with rape and other sexual violence being used as a war tactic in a number of countries during hostilities, including Sierra Leone, Liberia, Chad, and DRC. The psychological trauma, stigmatisation and physical injury to children caused by conflict, have profound and long-term impacts on children’s education and achievement. Armed conflicts have also resulted in the widespread destruction of school infrastructure, such as in Sierra Leone where, three years after the end of the war, 60% of schools still required rehabilitation.


Efforts are still needed to get every girl and boy to school; increase the numbers and proportion of female teachers at every level; and ensure gender sensitivity in learning environments and in teaching and learning materials.
1.3.3 Teachers

The struggle to expand the teaching workforce to match the rise in enrolment rates over the past decade has placed enormous strain on teaching across the continent. Many countries have drafted in unqualified teachers, provided with minimal or no training, to ease this pressure but a further 1.1 million teachers will be required in sub-Saharan Africa to achieve UPE by 2015. Class sizes remain high in many areas, and combined with a lack of teacher training, there are serious concerns over the quality of education that students are receiving. Assessments conducted in Malawi, Namibia and Zambia found that more than 70% of grade six students failed to achieve basic numeracy, despite completing a full cycle of primary education. The areas most in need of education personnel are countries affected by emergencies and disasters.

The presence of female teachers can play be very important in protecting girls from potential abuse and violence within schools. When well-trained, supported and motivated, they can also act as effective professional female role models for girls and in the wider community, challenging traditional views and socio-cultural norms around the roles of women. This is particularly important at secondary education level where the pressure on girls to leave education and conform to traditional roles becomes stronger. Higher numbers of female teachers have been shown to increase the rate of girls’ enrolment and help to sustain their participation in education.

1.3.4 Gender norms in wider society and early marriage

However, tackling gender equality within schools is only part of the issue. Many of these concerns and constraints have their roots in deep-seated inequalities in the wider community, which impact on girls’ ability to access schooling and to stay there. Changing these mindsets and behaviours is one of the biggest challenges facing girls’ education and also one of the most complex to address. The burden of caring and of household domestic labour falls on girls and women in traditional gendered roles. In situations of poverty or where parents are unable to work due to illness such as HIV and AIDS, these burdens are intensified and the value of having girls at home to undertake domestic chores, look after siblings or care for sick family members may be perceived to outweigh that of remaining in school. This is particularly the case in a context where girls’ futures roles are widely believed to be solely in the household. Recent studies in Benin, Ethiopia and Ghana, for

Outcomes of the ADEA 2008 Biennale on Education in Africa:

Dedicated initiatives and an intense effort to improve the percentage of female teachers in secondary and higher education are needed.

Of particular concern within this context of teacher shortages is the lack of female teachers. Whilst a few countries have recorded increases in the proportion of female teachers over the last decade, particularly in the primary sector (for example Togo and Eritrea), the overall trends have not been encouraging, with the sub-Saharan rate static in the primary sector at 43%, and actually declining for secondary from 31% to 29% with rates as low as 4% in Liberia and 7% in Togo.

Figure 6: % of female teachers in primary and secondary sectors in 1999 and 2008

- Ghana
- Egypt
- Togo
- Eritrea
- Liberia
- Zambia
example, found that parents, and in particular fathers, hold the belief that their sons are destined to become the heads of their families and earn money, while girls are destined to marry young, bear children and become housewives, and thus they didn’t see the value in investing in sending girls to school.\textsuperscript{34}

Early marriage in particular has been repeatedly identified as one of the major causes of girls’ dropping out of education: it is widespread in many parts of Africa with rates as high as 60% of girls married by the age of 18 in Niger, 47% in Chad and 32% in Nigeria.\textsuperscript{35} The negative consequences of early marriage extend across societies, ending girls’ education and reaching into the next generation. Children of young, uneducated mothers are less likely to have a good start in education, to do well in class, or to continue beyond the minimum schooling.\textsuperscript{36} Daughters of uneducated mothers are especially likely to drop out of school, marry young, and begin the cycle again.

1.3.5 Early pregnancy

A lack of access to sexual and reproductive health knowledge and services, the prevalence of sexual violence, and practices of child marriage mean that early pregnancy amongst primary and secondary school children is widespread; in sub-Saharan Africa more than 50% of girls reportedly give birth by the age of 20. As well as the significant health risks to mother and child, early pregnancy usually spells the end of girls’ schooling. This is also closely tied to factors of poverty and low socio-economic status that increase girls’ vulnerability to both non-enrolment and withdrawal from education and early pregnancy. In many countries regulations continue to exclude girls from school during pregnancy as well as after childbirth. Even where they are able to return to school, the lack of childcare options, the socio-cultural expectations and pressures of motherhood, a lack of support within schools and potential stigma and bullying from peers all make it significantly less likely that young mothers will continue their education.

\textbf{Article 21 (1) of the African Charter on The Rights And Welfare Of The Child:}

States Parties to the present Charter shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate harmful social and cultural practices affecting the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of the child and in particular:

(a) those customs and practices prejudicial to the health or life of the child; and

(b) those customs and practices discriminatory to the child on the grounds of sex or other status.
2. Policy and advocacy issues

2.1 Strategic focus areas

Attempting to tackle these issues and barriers to gender equality in education requires a holistic and coordinated approach within schools, across the education system and within communities and wider society. Considering the next strategic steps for progressing girls’ education in Africa raises three areas where progress is required and where identified barriers to girls’ education interact and are particularly acute:

- **Access of the most marginalised**: Under the pressure of MDG targets, much focus has been placed by governments, donors and civil society on issues of primary enrolment and access to education. Despite some progress in this area, it does, of course, remain a fundamental issue that requires continuing efforts across the region. Indeed, those still left out of school tend to be the most marginalized with the greatest educational needs, and efforts must become better nuanced to the factors of exclusion faced by these children, particularly girls, including the wider issues of social, economic and cultural marginalisation. This is particularly relevant to children living in conflict-affected areas.

- **Transition to post-primary education**: A focus on primary access is not enough to ensure gender equality in education or to its impact on to wider society. To make sure that progress is maintained and that primary access actually leads to improvement in children’s, and particularly girls’, long-term capabilities and life chances, governments, donors and civil society need to refocus and expand efforts around retention and, critically, transition to post-primary education, whether that be through formal or non-formal education streams. This is particularly important for girls, given their increased vulnerability at adolescence to those factors mentioned, such as sexual abuse, early pregnancy and gendered roles, and recognising the impact that education can have in addressing these.

- **Quality**: Closely associated is the need for a much greater concern for the quality of education that all children, but particularly girls, are receiving once in the education system. This is a growing focus internationally as the unintended demands from enrolment surges on under-resourced education systems have become apparent. As the World Bank Education Strategy 2020 states:

> When an education system fails to deliver learning, the failure is most severe for poor and disadvantaged children and young people. Learning gaps are most obvious when those children and youth do not enrol in school at all, but they also happen more insidiously, when disadvantaged students attend school but learn little because the schools they attend are of such poor quality.

Learning achievement is associated with household characteristics, so additional resources need to be allocated to schools serving disadvantaged girls to raise learning levels and reduce inequalities. This is linked to the need for increased levels of female teachers and school leaders, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas, lack of infrastructure and relevance of curriculum (including language of instruction).

These key areas form the basis of Plan International’s global advocacy campaign, **Because I Am A Girl**, and provide a framework for coordinated efforts on the key bottlenecks to girls’ education in Africa. Within this framework and from our existing knowledge of the situation in Africa, a number of priority policy issues arise that must be the focus for action.

2.2 Priority policy issues

2.2.1 Understanding and responding to the complexity of marginalisation

As enrolment advances, the focus has started to shift to the most difficult to reach – those that have not been reached by more general access strategies but who are essential to reach if the EFA and MDG access targets are to be achieved. As we have seen, girls make up the majority of this group and are most marginalised when gender inequalities intersect with other issues of exclusion such as conflict, poverty and varying social practices. Education must respond in ways that address these complex interactions and work towards:

- **Increased data, disaggregated by sex, on the most marginalised groups** to ensure that governments and education partners have the evidence and knowledge to identify and respond to these groups’ educational needs, and monitor progress against equity-based targets;
Targeted responses that tackle the combined factors of marginalisation. Social protection programmes, for example, make families less vulnerable to poverty, and able to keep their girls in school. Financial and other incentives have also been introduced, conditional on girls meeting certain criteria, to encourage girls from disadvantaged groups to enter and remain in school. These include cash transfer programmes, stipends, scholarships, and funding to cover the cost of transport and/or books and other learning materials. Specific consideration needs to be given to the provision of education in fragile and conflict affected states, where children have the highest likelihood of being marginalised and many of the barriers facing girls’ education are significantly exacerbated.

• Expanding ECCE opportunities, particularly for the most marginalised. Access and involvement in ECCE programmes can provide a firm basis for mitigating some of the barriers to education that children face later on in childhood, including cognitive, nutritional, social and health aspects.

• Flexible approaches that can reach the most marginalised and offer other educational opportunities for those who have already missed out on mainstream education. Non-formal programmes, for example, can be more flexible in responding to the needs of specific groups, including girls facing the most extreme forms of exclusion and vulnerability, such as street children, pastoralists, children in conflict and disaster situations and out-of-school adolescents. These programmes can enable students to acquire literacy, numeracy and other skills to increase their life chances and employment opportunities, or be an alternative way into, or back into, formal education for those who are over-age and excluded. Such programmes need to be well resourced and integrated into national strategy.

### 2.2.2 Girl-friendly schools and violence

As discussed, there are significant barriers to girls’ education and the realisation of their rights within schools. Without concerted action to improve the quality of education and to make more conducive environments for girls in schools, the bottlenecks to girls’ retention and transition will remain and the impact of education for those that are able to progress will be restricted. Action should focus on:

• Strengthening human rights protection for children affected by conflict, including refugees and IDPs; ensuring provision of safe, child-friendly education environments to populations trapped in violent conflict, and using these environments to unlock the potential of education as a force for peace.

• Establishing national policy frameworks for addressing violence against women and girls in and through education, outlining roles and responsibilities, accountability and ways of monitoring processes.

• Developing/strengthening legislation to eliminate gender-based violence, incorporating:
  • Teacher codes of conduct with zero tolerance for gender based violence within schools, clear actions for violations and strong reporting mechanisms
  • Awareness-raising programmes in communities on teacher codes of conduct and gender-based violence. These must incorporate men and boys and the issues of social norms (including masculinity) that provide the deep societal roots of GBV
  • Training on child protection and gender for teachers and law enforcement agencies

• Establishing girl-friendly criteria for schools and assessing all schools against these, including school planning and design, location, separate latrine facilities and needs of marginalised girls

• Strengthening women’s and girls’ participation in school administration and governance through representation in student bodies, parent-teacher associations and school management committees, and training and support to the girl and women members of these bodies
• Reviewing curricula and teaching and learning materials for gender sensitivity and gender equality
• Increasing the numbers and quality of teachers available, with a particular focus on female teachers, through:
  • Incentives or additional support to attract and retain female teachers, particularly at senior levels within schools
  • Quality training for all teachers and school administrators including child rights, positive discipline and sexual and reproductive health education
  • Raising the social standing of the teaching profession within communities
  • Adequate pay and conditions for teachers

2.2.3 Early marriage and early pregnancy
Early marriage and early pregnancy are important factors in girls’ dropout rates in the region, as well as violating their individual rights and stimulating a generational cycle of female vulnerability and poverty. Education duty bearers need to:
• Develop/strengthen national legislation on the prohibition of child marriage
• Reform administrative laws to ensure pregnancy and motherhood does not exclude girls from continuing their education
• Focus on the enforcement and monitoring of such legislation including school authorities, government, law enforcement agencies and civil society
• Strengthen public awareness campaigns to counter child marriage and early pregnancy, ensuring that men and boys are included in these campaigns
• Provide support and flexibility for young mothers to be able to balance childcare considerations with the continuation of their education
• Strengthen sexual and reproductive health education within schools and access to sexual and reproductive health services

2.3 Roles of stakeholders
2.3.1 Working with and lobbying national governments and international stakeholders
Governments need to be held to account to ensure that commitments to improving quality, access and equity in education are met, even when resource constraints limit options for reducing the household cost burden and improving the school infrastructure and environment.

Civil society plays a key role in advocating for and monitoring government budget commitments to education. This includes ensuring adequate budget allocations and developing systems that are transparent and ensure all allocated resources reach schools, pupils and communities.

Direct and indirect costs of ECCE and secondary education need to be lowered to improve gender parity and give greater opportunities to all children. Further, specific allocations for girls’ education need to be considered, including models which have been shown to improve their progress: school grants, conditional cash transfers, and scholarships and bursaries for marginalised girls.

Governments should develop financing formulas that prioritise need, ensuring that the poorest regions and groups are targeted for support and that equal education opportunities are available to disadvantaged girls and boys. Essential to this process is gender-disaggregated data collection on marginalised groups to provide an on-going basis for identification and monitoring of excluded children, and appropriate response to needs in policy and resources.

In post-conflict states in particularly, where education budgets have been squeezed for military priorities, huge improvements can be made by increased public spending on education, even from a low base. Providing resources to rebuild the education system and remove barriers will encourage girls back to school.

Article 21 (2) of the African Charter on The Rights And Welfare Of The Child:
Child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited and effective action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years and make registration of all marriages in an official registry compulsory.

Article 11 (6): States Parties to the present Charter shall have all appropriate measures to ensure that children who become pregnant before completing their education shall have an opportunity to continue with their education on the basis of their individual ability.
At international level, civil society has a role to play in keeping girls’ education on the agenda and in donor budgets. Many governments have far fewer resources than they had anticipated to meet the EFA goals and MDGs. Some donors spend a large part of their aid budgets on higher education, and a significant proportion of this may be in higher institutions within their own countries. If all donors could be persuaded to commit at least half their aid to support basic education in low income countries this could mobilise an additional US$ 1.7 billion annually for basic education.

In conflict affected areas, the education sector currently receives just 2% of humanitarian aid – and the humanitarian aid system itself is underfunded. Conflict-affected and fragile states receive nearly four times less basic education aid per out-of-school primary age child than other lower-income countries.38 All the agencies involved in the EFA partnership need to press for greater priority to be accorded to education in financing requests and delivery, and for education to be used as a force for peace.

The Global Partnership for Education

The Global Partnership for Education (formally FTI) includes 46 developing countries, and over 30 bilateral, regional, and international agencies, development banks, the private sector, teachers, and local and global civil society groups. Civil society organisations have played an important role in these partnerships at country level, participating in Local Education Group activities, including planning, and involvement in monitoring budget allocations and education service delivery, to ensure equitable provision of quality basic education to girls experiencing different levels of marginalisation around the country. CSOs provide an effective way for groups representing girls and women to participate and feed into key activities at national level, including Joint Sector Reviews.

2.3.2 Raising awareness at community level

Civil society organisations can act as an important link between governments, their bilateral and multilateral partners, and local communities. CSOs have a critical role to play in the dialogue on education, because, as a result of their strategic partnerships at international, country, regional and local levels, they can ensure stakeholders have the knowledge to hold governments accountable for their education investments and results. This role includes raising awareness of government policies to stakeholders and beneficiaries, providing the information and tools for communities to demand what has been promised and hold local and national governments to account on their commitments. Organisations can support people from the communities they work with to put forward their perspectives on education, feeding back to governments and donor partners about the realities in schools and communities, and highlighting gaps in policy and policy dissemination.

Strengthening communities’ capacity to demand their rights and the rights of their children should also incorporate methods to challenge existing or traditional social norms which constrain girls’ access to and achievement in education – environments in which early marriage and gender-based violence may be prevalent, for example. Understanding and working to challenge cultural values is sensitive and problematic, and can be slow to show results. However, issues around girls’ education are multi-faceted, and change must be promoted to duty bearers at all levels: national and local governments; donors and international organisations; schools, teachers and school leaders; parents and communities; and girls and boys. Civil society organisations must work with other actors and stakeholders to gain an understanding of contexts and the important role of parents and communities in enabling girls to fulfil their potential within education and beyond.

2.4 2015 and beyond

There is a danger that the achievements in gender parity at primary level will obscure the huge challenges that remain for girls, in retention, completion, transition to secondary and quality learning in education. The role of civil society is essential in keeping girls’ education high on the international and national agendas in the run up to and beyond the MDG 2015 target.

2.4.1 Coalitions and collaboration

Working collaboratively, by advocating the same messages through a strategic framework, civil society organisations can have a huge impact at national and international level. Building coalitions increases the demand for change, and social mobilization and awareness-raising efforts can widen the platform of support and the range of policy options.39
The example of the UN Secretary-General’s development of a Joint Action Plan for accelerating progress on maternal and newborn health is salutary. Sustained engagement of stakeholders (including governments, foundations, the corporate sector, civil society and UN agencies) throughout 2009 and 2010 resulted in a raft of commitments from all partners, which were showcased at the UN High-Level meeting on the MDGs in September 2010. This action created a valuable momentum for change in the period up to 2015, and similar actions might be considered to raise the profile and actions around education and gender.

Coalitions need to identify the strengths of the partners including: expertise in specific areas, previous reports and established campaigns. This allows an efficient and effective use of resources, whilst adding value to global messages.

2.4.2 Getting the right messages

Civil society organisations need to work together to develop SMART, strategic objectives, asking for specific policy changes and backing up demands with evidence. Campaigns on girls’ education must reach audiences at all levels, and messages need to be developed to be contextually appropriate and relevant depending on the audience (local, national, international etc). Advocacy takes time: legislation change does not happen quickly and it needs substantial and continual efforts to ensure meaningful implementation of the changes.

Managing a global advocacy campaign: Because I Am A Girl

Plan International will launch BIAGG in October 2012. The strategy will building on a ‘trajectory of influence’ over time to increase and extend momentum and impact. The overall advocacy trajectory can be summarised in three phases:

**Phase One:** Developing evidence and building partnerships, recognition and momentum

**Phase Two:** Targeted and coordinated advocacy influence

**Phase Three:** Long term integration and implementation

Plan has identified two priority issues, which will be turned into SMART policy asks. On each of these, an advocacy report and a short policy briefing paper will be produced before the launch.

A three year advocacy strategy will then be developed on each of these issues, to be implemented by cross-Plan thematic taskforces, made up of the different offices that choose the issue.

These priority issues will then be underpinned by a cross-cutting public policy position about what we are asking in terms of how to finance girl’s post-primary quality education around the world.


21 UNESCO (2011), Make it Right: Ending the crisis in girls’ education. Washington DC, USA, Global Partnership for Education.


25 Ibid


32 Figure from World Bank (2012), World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development, Washington DC, USA, World Bank


36 Data from UNESCO (2011), Make it Right: Ending the crisis in girls’ education.


41 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (no date), Data centre http://www.uis.unesco.org/Pages/default.aspx.

42 UNESCO (2011), Make it Right: Ending the crisis in girls’ education.

43 GCE/RESULTS (2011), Make it Right: Ending the crisis in girls’ education.

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