

Summary of the findings and recommendations of the formative evaluation of country, regional and global partnerships of the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative

In 2010, The Global Advisory Committee (GAC) of UNGEI commissioned a formative evaluation of the partnership at the global, regional and country levels. Conducted ten years after the establishment of UNGEI, the evaluation sought to establish a baseline for the partnership, and to document achievements and challenges in the three UNGEI outcome areas, namely:

- Policy and advocacy for girls' education and gender equality
- Good practice identification and dissemination
- Partnership establishment

The evaluation also examined interactions between the global, country and regional levels of the partnership. In addition, the proposed UNGEI Monitoring and Evaluation Framework which will form the basis for future assessment of progress was validated through the evaluation process.

The evaluation took place over a period of nine months, covered four country case studies - Egypt, Nepal, Nigeria, and Uganda - and the East Asia and the Pacific (EAP) regional partnership. Another part of data collection was a mapping of UNGEI in 57 countries which were on record as having an active partnership or some UNGEI-led activities, as well as conducting interviews with global stakeholders, and undertaking a review of documentation. Quality assurance was provided by the Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group of the GAC and country-based UNICEF M & E Officers, while national, regional and global reference groups reviewed the methodology, draft and final reports.

While the evaluation was able to collect and triangulate sufficient data for the key areas of inquiry, allowing it to respond to the main evaluation questions, there were challenges in retroactively establishing baselines for each partnership in contexts where records and documentation were not systematically kept. Also, high staff turn-over in

agencies complicated the task further, as did the poor security in some countries.

Overall conclusions

One of the main findings of the evaluation is that **UNGEI has played a prominent policy advocacy role for girls' education and gender equality in selected fora**. This role has been particularly prominent globally and in the EAP region, as well as in selected countries – such as Nigeria and Uganda. As a result of its policy advocacy role, **UNGEI has established itself as a recognized partnership in the global dialogue around girls' education and gender equality**. UNGEI's participation and technical inputs into global education fora and initiatives – such as the Education for All Global Monitoring Report – have contributed to a stronger focus on girls' education and gender equality in policy dialogue, in documentation, and in policy discussions.

At the regional level, the evaluation assessed the two partnership arrangements or approaches, both resourced with Regional Focal Points (RFPs). One is the East Asia and Pacific Region approach, which is a formal partnership of regional organizations that make substantive contribution to policy and advocacy from a regional standpoint. The other approach, obtaining in Eastern and Southern Africa Region, Middle East and North Africa, West and Central Africa Region, is that of working through RFPs to support country partnerships in their efforts towards advancing girls' education and gender equality. The EAP regional partnership approach was found to be limited by the absence of outreach into the countries in the region, and by the fact that there is little evidence that it uses member organizations as a channel for reaching into countries for advocacy purposes.

Pertaining to good practice, the evaluation found that **UNGEI has played a role in collecting, synthesizing, and disseminating good practice at all levels**. For example, the evaluation found evidence of

good practices being implemented and shared, of capacity being built around good practice identification and reporting, and of good practices being used to inform policy development in country case studies. At the regional level, EAPR has been particularly active in producing toolkits and studies through collective efforts by the UNGEI members, and these products are considered relevant and of high quality. However, the extent to which good practices had informed policy and practice at regional and national levels was not well documented.

At global level, UNGEI's work on good practice was considered valuable, although some voiced the need for UNGEI to establish itself as a leading reference on good practice in girls' education and gender equality – something which is not presently a goal of UNGEI. For the future, many stakeholders would like to see UNGEI play a more prominent overall knowledge management role in the education and gender equality arena. In this role UNGEI would function as a knowledge hub of best practice, delivered for and by partner agencies.

UNGEI was also found to have constituted a **valuable mechanism for coordination and priority setting among members** at all levels. UNGEI governance structures were strengthened over the past years and allowed the partnership to make decisions and move forward in its main areas of activity. However, two areas were identified for strengthening, namely, the responsibility for operational decision-making at the global level – in particular between the Global Advisory Committee (GAC) and the UNGEI Secretariat – and the technical capacity of UNGEI at the global level, which was seen as falling short of what the partnership needs to advance its goals (at all levels).

Other areas of improvement was for GAC members to work on enhancing their understanding of how country partnerships work, for the membership and functioning of UNGEI to be examined in light of the changing landscape in girls' education and gender equality, and for partner organizations to find ways to strengthen their institutional commitment to UNGEI (as opposed to relying on individual commitment of representatives of partner organizations).

At national level, the evaluation found that UNGEI has active partnerships in 33 of 57 countries

previously reported as having partnerships. Fourteen of the 33 countries meet the three criteria that UNGEI has established for the existence of a partnership¹.

The goals of **UNGEI country partnerships mirror those of the global partnership, underscoring the relevance of UNGEI's agenda**. The majority of the 33 country partnerships operate at the national level, while a substantial number operate at sub-national levels. Countries engage in a range of activities; advocacy/sensitization, training and capacity building, materials production and dissemination figure prominently among the activities. The in-school population at primary level is the largest beneficiary of UNGEI at country level, followed by the in-school secondary population. More than half of the countries reported having activities for out-of-school primary children. Financial resources are by far the most frequently cited challenge for partnerships.

Ten (of 33) country partnerships that were established have since ceased to exist. Reasons for the demise of the partnership vary from country to country. In countries where strong partnerships exist, UNGEI was found to have positioned itself as a valuable and strong player in policy dialogue and advocacy, and has also played a major role in promoting and sharing of good practice. The evaluation did not do an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the partnerships across all 33 countries, but case studies seem to indicate that critical factors for success of country partnerships include **government commitment, leadership of the partnership, partnership composition, technical capacity, outreach to local levels and structures, and mechanisms for decision-making and operation**.

However, the evaluation also found that some of these areas – in particular strengthening of the partnership models, in-country training and support, and exchanges between partnerships for sharing of experience – have received relatively little support. A number of countries underscored capacity challenges among UNGEI members and the need for improved technical knowledge on gender issues and on

¹ The criteria for determining if a partnership can be formally considered as UNGEI are as follows: a) the existence of terms of reference that formalize the mandate, members and governance of the national or sub-national partnership; b) the existence of an annual work plan that is monitored by the national partnership; and, c) annual reporting to the UNGEI RFP against the work plan.

communication skills. Country case studies also highlighted the need for sound analyses for persistence of the disparities between girls and boys. This was considered particularly critical for decisions around future operations and policies, as well as essential to building the capacity of the partnerships.

The evaluation noted also, that **a substantial number of countries have poor systems for monitoring and evaluation of UNGEI operations and activities, or no systems at all.** Going forward, country partnerships could benefit from stronger support in strengthening partnerships management, as well as technical inputs into locally-relevant areas of capacity building, exchange of experience between partnerships, monitoring and evaluation, and research. The feedback to the evaluation highlighted that UNGEI should strengthen its strategic planning and its technical capacity to meet these needs. In this context, the UNGEI Monitoring and Evaluation Framework is considered a valid and important tool by countries and regions for improving the monitoring and priority-setting of the partnership.

Overall and for the future, the evaluation concluded that the goals for which UNGEI was established continue to be valid and important even in a changed development aid and education context. A strong and pronounced engagement of partners in the girls' education and gender equality agenda has been achieved in the past ten years and provides an opportunity for continuing to harness collective efforts. Progress in gender parity in education in many countries has been a key achievement over the past decade – and one to which UNGEI contributed. However, considerable – and more complex – challenges and gaps in girls' education and gender equality remain and will require more difficult-to-achieve changes. This implies an adjusted policy advocacy role for UNGEI – with a more targeted agenda that builds on UNGEI's strengths.

UNGEI has clear areas of strength and added value. A major area of strength has been its interaction and input into a select number of influential global initiatives where it has sought to present evidence and highlight key issues. The diversity of its membership, at the global, regional and country levels is a further strength. This has opened up the discussion between partners, improved understanding of issues and resulted in collaborative

efforts and in a stronger focus on strengthening the evidence base around girls' education and gender equality. However, UNGEI has been less successful in consistently monitoring the progress on girls' education at regional and country levels. These strengths provide a solid basis for further sharpening UNGEI's strategies and for continuing to influence the girls' education and gender equality agenda in the coming years.

UNGEI's organizational structure has been an important operational basis for its work. UNGEI's strong link with UNICEF has allowed it to tap into UNICEF's technical and other resources, but has at times made it difficult to identify a distinct UNGEI contribution. **The UNGEI Secretariat has provided key follow-up between UNGEI meetings, and has sustained the link with the regional and country levels.** However, UNGEI's technical capacity has at times been insufficient and the use of working groups has not always provided an efficient solution.

While RFPs based at UNICEF regional offices are a key link between the different levels of UNGEI, the amount of time devoted to the regional activities by respective RFPs varies considerably. RFPs provided important support in the mobilization phase to establish country-level partnerships, as well as technical and financial inputs into country-level processes. There is room for further engagement and improvement of mechanisms and models for partnership functioning and in capacity building. RFPs are thus a useful resource which could be further tapped for ensuring that the country partnership mechanisms are further strengthened, and that UNGEI's global decision-making is better informed by country needs.

Recommendations

First, **the evaluation recommended that UNGEI should make policy advocacy the main priority for its future endeavors at global level and equip itself to be a strong advocate for the priorities that it identifies.** In this role, UNGEI should be guided/supported by:

- A 5-10 year evidence-based, focused agenda of policy advocacy priorities in girls' education and gender equality, clearly identifying advocacy goals, targets and strategies, as well as means for measuring progress and outcomes at all levels at which UNGEI operates;

- The establishment of an advisory/guidance panel on policy advocacy as part of its organizational structure. The panel should bring together key experts in this area to provide technical inputs into the main decision-making structures of UNGEI on priorities and to assist in monitoring progress; and,
- The recruitment of an additional full-time staff member for the Secretariat to support its technical input into the policy advocacy agenda.

Second, **UNGEI should develop a plan of priority activities and publications aligned with its proposed medium-term agenda in policy advocacy.** This plan should include:

- Mechanisms for strong and consistent engagement with the international academic community to strengthen relevant good practice identification, documentation and dissemination;
- Clear dissemination strategies and targets for publications, as well as a strategy for tracking the impact of its publications to learn lessons and inform strategizing on future priorities; and,
- The development and dissemination of a practical guideline for country partnerships and actors to identify, synthesize and disseminate good practice.

Third, **strengthen the global UNGEI partnership by:**

- Reviewing the membership of the GAC with a view to adding members that play a key role in the overall agenda, and phasing out members in line with UNGEI's revised focus and priorities;
- Recruiting a small number of country-level members to enhance the understanding and responsiveness of the GAC to country-level issues; and,
- Putting in place clear directives for the involvement of institutions in the GAC (as opposed to individuals); member institutions should take it upon themselves to revise the terms of reference to reflect responsibilities of participating staff members as institutional representatives on the UNGEI GAC.

Fourth, **enhance the capacity and the relevance of the work that is done by UNGEI at regional level by:**

- Negotiating with UNICEF for RFPs to devote a major portion of their time to UNGEI;

- Prioritizing a focus on the national level, and in particular on strengthening country partnerships, across all the regions, rather than the establishment of regional partnerships;
- Working with RFPs to develop multi-year regional strategies and plans that outline priorities for UNGEI support for the regions, based on an assessment of progress and gaps;
- Putting in place mechanisms for knowledge sharing and dissemination between RFPs and national members; and,
- Making policy advocacy the main focus of UNGEI in EAP region while using partner structures to develop outreach strategies which will influence policy dialogue and decision-making at country level. The formalization of an UNGEI partnership with one or several countries in the region is recommended in this context as a way to both inform and be informed by country needs.

Fifth, **strengthen national-level partnerships by:**

- Developing and implementing a prioritized capacity-building plan for national level-partnerships. The plan should identify priority countries, identify the main areas of weakness, and where and how UNGEI might prioritize strengthening of these partnerships;
- Identifying strategies for advocating and securing stronger involvement of national leadership in UNGEI;
- Providing technical and financial support to priority countries to conduct situation analyses for persistence of the disparities among girls and boys;
- Conducting a further analysis of the funding situation and options for funding country-level partnerships, identifying priority actions to ensure that partnerships have a small budget that allows them to function and provide seed money for selected activities – this could possibly be done by devolving some of the UNICEF budget within UNICEF's thematic funding to the country level; and,
- Strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of UNGEI operations, a task which has largely been performed by the Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group of the GAC.