

PRESS RELEASE



Concerted efforts needed to improve Post-Primary Education in Eastern and Southern Africa

Addis Ababa, 27 Feb 2007: Experts and education officials from 20 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa are calling upon governments and development agencies to pay greater attention to the large number of children who fail to proceed to secondary school because of limited opportunities.

Meeting in Addis Ababa under the auspices of the UN Girls Education Initiative, the experts say governments need to consolidate the gains made in universal primary education by abolishing school fees for lower and upper secondary education, investing more in vocational and technical education and job training, and promoting lifeskills, health education, and income generating programmes.

Several countries in the region have succeeded in increasing primary school enrolments largely by abolishing school fees and recruiting more teachers. However, transition rates for children from primary to secondary school remain relatively poor. Burundi, Mozambique, and Tanzania, for example, have transition rates of below 35 per cent, meaning less than four out of every 10 children make it to secondary school. Botswana, Kenya, Namibia, and South Africa are among the better performers at more than 85 per cent.

Kenya's Assistant Minister of Education Honourable Beth Mugo attributes the poor transition rates to poverty, poor funding to schools, not enough secondary school teachers, inadequate classroom facilities, underemployment of school leavers, and HIV/AIDS. For girls, puberty, pregnancy, and early marriage are major barriers, with only one in five girls enrolling in secondary school. Any approaches to improve post primary education need to address these barriers but should equally focus specifically on girls, given the benefits that girls' education have for both families and communities.

"Girls who have a secondary education tend to have fewer and healthier children," said Aster Haregot, UNICEF's Focal Point on the UN Girls Education Initiative for Eastern and Southern Africa. "Studies from Uganda and Zimbabwe have also shown that girls who received primary and some secondary education had lower HIV infection rates than those who did not attend school. Secondary education for girls therefore is an effective barrier against HIV."

There are encouraging signs that countries are beginning to act. Last week, Uganda became the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to provide free secondary education to a potential target of 250,000 students. Others may soon follow suit.

About UNGEI

The United Nations Girl's Education Initiative (UNGEI) is a partnership of organizations committed to the goals of narrowing the gender gap in primary and secondary education by 2005 and ensuring that, by 2015, all children complete primary schooling, with girls and boys having equal access to free, quality education. It was launched in April 2000 and consists of the United Nations System, governments, donor countries, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector and communities and families.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in 156 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

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