

STATEMENT

**STATEMENT BY FANTANESH TILAHUN
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AT THE ETHIOPIAN TEENAGERS' FORUM ON GIRLS' EDUCATION
4 MARCH 2004**

H.E. Mr Bjorn Ljungqvist, UNICEF Representative
Honorable Participants
Invited Guests
Ladies and Gentlement

On behalf of the Ministry of Education and myself I would like to express my gratitude to be with you at this special event that focuses on girls' education.

Dear participants,

As you all know, the Education For All movement and the Millennium Development Goal targeted gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and universal primary education by 2015.

Gender parity in primary and secondary education is the first test of the World's Commitment to the broader goal of universal primary education for all and poverty alleviation as well as other goals of the Millennium Development.

Girls' education is a tool to promote gender equality and empowerment, eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health and combat HIV/AIDS and ensure environmental sustainability.

Although decades after commitment have been made to ensure equality education for every child, some 121 million primary school age children are out of school worldwide. Most of these children are girls.

Ethiopia, as one of the beneficiary countries from the Millennium Development Goals, has shown its commitment in the Education and Training Policy and the Education Sector Development program to provide access to quality learning opportunity for all school age children.

Despite the significant progress in increasing access to and coverage of education, attempts to narrow gender and regional gap and maintaining efficiency has been slow.

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In 2002/2003 only 53.8 per cent and 14.3 per cent of girls were enrolled in primary and secondary education compared to 74.6 per cent and 19.3 per cent of boys respectively. The gender gap is 20.8 per cent in primary and 9.7 per cent in secondary education.

Moreover, more than 65 per cent of girls leave the education system before reaching grade five.

The proportion of girls decreases as education level increases. There are only 25.2 per cent of females enrolling in higher education compared to 41.2 per cent of primary and 36.6 per cent of secondary enrollment.

The gender gap is wider in under-served and pastoral regions.

Although the national gross enrolment ratio is increased to 64.6 per cent, the two pastoralist regions, namely Somali and Afar, it is only fifteen per cent.

The participation of girls in pastoral and underserved regions is much lower than the national girls' gross enrolment ratio, which is only 11 per cent. These gender and regional disparities need urgent attention. I hope this forum will have a positive impact to improve the situation and share experience to those regions' teenagers to establish a similar forum to discuss their issues.

Dear participants,

As many researches conducted to close the gender gap and improve retention of girls indicate, many of the obstacles that keep girls from enjoying their right to complete their education are found outside of school.

Girls are often kept at home because of poverty, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, harmful traditional practices, fear of sexual violence and domestic workloads. Lack of gender sensitive school environment and curriculum also affect girls' education.

Solutions for girls' education must come not only from the education sector. A multi-sectional approach is needed to overcome the obstacles keeping girls from school.

Interventions in improving health and nutrition, and decreasing the domestic workload as well as supporting in school fees contribute to better survival and performance of girls.

In order to tackle harmful traditional practice, gender based violence and HIV/AIDS, the role of youth and community at large is very important.

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As you are from different schools and organizations, your experience in these regards is very important to improve girls' education.

I hope this forum will discuss the problems of Girls' Education and propose valuable solutions.

Finally, I declare the forum officially opened.

*For more information, please contact the UNICEF Communications Section,
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