

WORKSHOP 1

Quality Education and Gender Equality

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WORKSHOP 1

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Introductory videos:

Workshop 1 A : « *FAWE Girls' School Project* » (Rwanda)

Recently inaugurated, the FAWE (Forum for African Women Educationalists) Girls' School is a unique initiative of FAWE Rwanda. The project aims at fostering girls' education at the secondary level through a holistic approach. Special emphasis is placed on the teaching of science, technology, languages and life-skills. This film introduces Winnie, a student from the Girls' School, who takes the viewer on a tour through the various facets of this project that has already started to make a strong impact on the lives of many girls.

Workshop 1 B: « *GEM: an initiative towards girls' education* » (Uganda)

The Girls Education Movement (GEM) is an African-wide, child-centred project launched by UNICEF in 2001 that aims at empowering girls and ensuring their educational opportunities. This film introduces the FAWE project in Uganda through the story of Edita, a student who was brought back to school thanks to the movement's initiative. Some GEM strategies and actions that have proven thus far to be successful in promoting girls' education are also featured in the video.

Discussion Paper

1. All countries in the world are contending, to different degrees, with problems of gender inequality, and education is often regarded as one of the principal tools for tackling this problem. In most countries, women and girls are disadvantaged, compared to men and boys, as regards access to social goods and services as well as influence and control over decision-making processes and social/political institutions that determine quality of life. This is true within families and households, as well as within the local community and at the national level. As opportunities for female advancement in education increase, countries tend to become more successful in addressing the problem of gender inequality in society. As such, the design and implementation of quality education programmes has implications for progress in the area of gender equity. This workshop will explore some of the links between quality education and gender equity in order to throw light on what needs to be done in terms of policies, strategies and investment choices in education.

(A) Linking Equity to Quality Education and Investment Choices

2. The critical importance of gender equity for development is reflected in the high priority given to it in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Dakar goals set for Education for All (EFA). However gender equity in education is an imperative that goes beyond its importance or usefulness for development. It is essentially a human rights issue and goes to the heart of what quality education should be about. If education is a basic human right then quality education should promote equity and not perpetuate

structural inequalities, forms of discrimination or existing disparities. It is therefore unfortunate that the debate on gender parity and equity in education tends to be focused mainly on access, and that analysis of quality in education often does not include gender parity/equity as one of the main indicators of quality.

Q1. Should gender equity be one of the indicators of quality in education? If so, how can this concept be made an integral part of education assessment and evaluation?

3. While all countries have a problem of gender inequity, the issue is particularly acute in the developing countries because of low levels of female participation in education as well as other deep-rooted forms of gender bias and discrimination in society. As a result, women and girls constitute the great majority of illiterate adults and youths in these developing countries. This is a compounding factor, since research shows consistently that level of education of mothers is a major determinant of schooling for the children. The danger then is that with such a high population of illiterate female adults, children will be less likely to enroll or complete a course of quality basic education with satisfactory performance. It is in this sense that adult basic education and literacy (ABEL) becomes a vital investment (especially for women) if the cycle of illiteracy, ignorance and poverty is to be broken. In terms of education as a human right it can be argued that parents have a duty to ensure that their children can access, attend, and satisfactorily complete a course of quality basic education. However if parents are themselves illiterate then they are not in a position to fulfill their obligations to their children as regards the right to education. There is therefore a strong case for investing in ABEL (for women in particular) in order to redress the imbalance of illiteracy amongst the adult population, as well as to enable them to fulfill their duties to their children in respect of education, and also to fulfill their own basic right to education as individuals in society.

4. Despite a high level of adult illiteracy, the hope for developing countries lies in the fact that their population profile tends to be skewed towards the younger age group. If in spite of adult illiteracy levels the majority of children and young people can be provided with quality basic education, then there is a chance of breaking the cycle of illiteracy, ignorance and the attendant poverty that continues from one generation to the next. This highlights the critical importance of investing in quality basic education for all children in a manner that promotes and sustains gender equity. The investments required to achieve this relate not only to providing facilities, staffing and other resources for schooling, but also to addressing and eliminating the barriers and constraints that prevent some children from accessing, and satisfactorily completing a course of quality basic education.

5. These barriers and constraints tend to affect girls much more than boys in most countries and they can be found within the education sector as well as outside of education. Girls tend to start school late or not at all because they are more engaged in household chores and income generating activities than boys; or because parents are more concerned for their safety and security away from home; or because households prefer to send boys to school rather than girls, where financial decisions are involved. Girls are also more likely to drop out of school than boys because the physical and psychological conditions as well as the entire school culture/ethos can often be insensitive to the needs that are peculiar to girls and their right to education. It is against this type of background that the case for girls' education is often made. The argument is that efforts to provide quality basic education for all children will not result in gender equity, unless there is a

special focus on the rights and needs of girls as an integral part of such efforts. It is also often argued that by focusing on the rights and needs of girls in education, it is possible to leverage quality education for all boys and girls alike. UNICEF expresses this argument with the catch phrase that:

“Girls’ education is also good for boys, but the reverse is not necessarily true”

On this basis it can be argued that investment in quality education should necessarily also entail investment in girls’ education as a means of ensuring that gender equity, based on a human rights approach to education, is an integral part of quality education. Indeed it has been suggested that without such considerations we run the risk of making broad progress with the MDGs, while inequalities are exacerbated. We need to avoid such a false sense of progress in education by ensuring that equity issues generally are integral to the concept of quality in education.

6. Developing countries have been making good progress with initial enrolment in school over the past decade, but many children and young people have routinely fall between the cracks because they did not start school at the right age and are now too old to enroll in first grade. In addition, for those who succeed in starting school, completion is still the major problem. Large numbers of girls and boys drop out before completing a basic cycle of quality education. In this sense there is also a major gender disparity that results in millions more girls than boys dropping out of school in sub-Saharan Africa for instance. It is estimated that the number of school-aged girls out of school in sub-Saharan Africa increased from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002. These out-of-school children and youths are at risk of various forms of exploitation like child labour, child trafficking and sexual exploitation, as well as exposure to HIV/AIDS infection. All of this results in a strong case for investing in education of out-of-school adolescents and youths through alternative forms of education such as non-formal education and training.

Q2. In an environment of resource constraints how should countries invest in education to address the following priorities?

(a) Education for all school-aged children to ensure that future problems of illiterate adults and youths do not arise.

(b) Education for Adults to empower parents as a way of ensuring that they can support and facilitate the education of their children

(c) Education for out-of-school adolescents and youths to prevent another generation sliding into illiteracy, ignorance and the attendant poverty.

(B) Defining Quality Education with an eye on Equity

7. There are two main approaches generally used to define quality in education. The first is to use a systems framework and then assess the quality of education in terms of inputs, process and outputs. This is essentially an efficiency model that typically rates the results achieved (usually a measure of learning achievement) against the quantum of investments made in the system and the efficacy of the processes through which the results have been obtained. It is also a normative production model in that it assumes matters of goals and

interests are largely uncontested and the issue of quality is simply about how much inputs it takes and what processes are essential for achieving the desired output. In order to bring equity into this model it will be necessary to adopt a human rights approach to analyzing inputs, processes and outcome.

8. The second approach generally used to define quality involves a sector framework that treats education as one sector that is closely interlinked with other sectors in the society. This approach is concerned with 3 main strands that constitute quality of education, in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. The issue of relevance acknowledges that the goals set and content prescribed for education are contentious and often have to be negotiated. We cannot talk of quality education when the goals and content do not address the needs of the learners or the values and aspirations of the community and the society at large. Effectiveness is about how far the goals and objectives set are being achieved. Here again there is a broader scope of consideration in that a wide range of goals could be set in terms of information, knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and change in behaviour patterns, etc. A quality education must deliver on what it promises, and this is what is being assessed by looking at effectiveness as a measure of quality. Efficiency concerns what it takes to deliver on the promises of quality education. It is about whether increased results could be achieved with the same resources, or whether the current results could be achieved with less resources. In other words efficiency as a measure of quality education relates to the adequacy of resources and the efficacy of methods used. Here again we need to adopt a human rights approach in order to inject equity issues into this model of quality education.

9. Defining quality education in terms of a human rights approach involves systematic review of the factors that facilitate or hinder the rights of various groups, at each stage of analysis in the model used to define quality. This is best done by focusing on the learner as someone with a right to education and reviewing factors relating to access, attendance, attainment (completion) and achievement for different groups of learners.

10. Against this background, and with reference to the background paper, **the workshop might wish to discuss the following statements and assertions** regarding quality education and gender equity:

- (a) A quality education is fully inclusive in that it is accessible to girls and boys on an equitable basis since barriers to provision of opportunities and uptake of such opportunities have been fairly addressed for girls as well as boys.**
- (b) A quality education promotes regular and timely attendance by all girls and boys, because its scheduling and pace have been designed with consideration for other demands on the time and schedule of learners and their families; and also because its culture and ethos are welcoming and gender sensitive.**
- (c) A quality education is one in which the goals set relate to self identity within the local culture and community interests, and self fulfillment in relation to the endless possibilities outside the local culture and reality.**
- (d) A quality education promotes and safeguards the rights of all girls and boys alike, within a learning environment that encourages them to achieve of their best in a journey of self discovery that brings out their full potential.**

- (e) A quality education is one that makes adequate provision of essential resources for learning for all learners and all schools. This includes trained teachers, books, and other pedagogical resources, as well as non-pedagogical essentials like school meals.**