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parties to eliminate discrimination against girls in education, including discrimination against minority girls and those living in rural areas.

Education is critical for empowering women and girls. Extensive evidence shows that educated women become more effective agents of change, able to improve both their own well-being and the welfare of their families. These empowering effects of education for women and girls are manifested in a variety of ways, including increased income-earning potential, ability to bargain for resources within the household, decision-making autonomy and participation in public life. It is also well documented that improvement in education of girls is a critical factor in ensuring positive health outcomes, lowering age at marriage, increasing control over fertility, preventing violence - including female genital mutilation/cutting, and reducing the risks of HIV infection.

Despite the recognition of education as a fundamental right for all children and the clear evidence of the benefits of education for women and girls, there remains significant discrimination against girls in education in many parts of the world. The statistics are clear. According to the Millennium Development Goals Report in 2007, 57 percent of the approximately 72 million children of primary school age not in school in 2005 were girls. It is estimated that 85 per cent of all girls out of school live in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific. In South Asia girls constitute two-thirds of all out of school children.

### **Global advocacy and policy efforts on the education of girls**

The gender-based discrimination faced by girls in access to and benefits of education has received attention by the international commun

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all countries before 2015. Governments were called upon to reduce female illiteracy rates to at least half their 1990 level, with emphasis on rural women, migrants, refugees and internally displaced women and women with disabilities. The Platform also addressed vocational training; science and technology; and the development of non-discriminatory education and training.

The outcome of the five-year review of implementation of the Platform for Action in 2000, noted increased awareness of the importance of education for gender equality and identified achievements in education and training of girls at all levels. It highlighted, however, that progress was hampered by insufficient resources and political will to improve educational infrastructure; persistent gender stereotypes in educational material and in society at large; child labour and the heavy domestic responsibilities of girls; and inadequate nutrition and access to health services.

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In the 2005 World Summit, Member States indicated that progress for women is progress for all, and resolved to promote gender equality and eliminate pervasive gender discrimination by, among other things, eliminating gender inequalities in primary and secondary education by the earliest possible dates and at all educational levels by 2015.

**Strategies to address gender-based discrimination in education**

Considerable efforts have been made in the United Nations context to increase the access to and benefits of education for girls. Member States have also undertaken many measures at different levels to improve girls' access to education, such as

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the school environment itself. Policies of zero tolerance for violence against girls, provision of appropriate sanitation and recreational facilities, and securing of safe routes to and from school are critical. The threat of harassment violates girls' human rights. In creating a girl friendly environment in schools, it is important to engage boys (as

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girls, in employment and other areas. This is not automatic. In some regions while

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for girls' empowerment by improving access to information on health, nutrition, education, and other human development opportunities. They also create new opportunities for social interaction, including peer and bottom-up communication. Strategies and action plans are needed at all levels to ensure equal access to and benefits of ICT, starting from an early age.

### **Recent initiatives on girls' education**

To accelerate the implementation of the internationally-agreed commitments on girls' education, the United Nations Secretary-General, launched the United Nations

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The taskforce also undertook the challenging task of estimating the costs of addressing gender inequality in different areas. Estimates indicated that the basic objective of universal primary education is not affordable at the current level of financial investment in education in developing countries. Since the bulk of the costs are for recurrent expenditure, the challenge goes far beyond the initial physical investment, which what is usually financed with the assistance of external aid. An important implication for Governments is that, apart from the need for increased financial resources for education of girls, there is also an urgent need for institutional reforms and increased efficiency in the educational system. From the point of view of the international community, there is a need for increased technical assistance, with more effective gender-sensitive implementation of such assistance, and a strengthened focus on regions where there are serious constraints to implementation of the MDG3, in particular Sub-Saharan Africa. There must also be a stronger focus on groups of girls at high risk of discrimination, such as girls from poor households, in early marriages, living in rural areas, in domestic service, belonging to an ethnic minority, having a disability or living in a region affected by or recovering from conflict.

Two studies submitted to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session in 2006 - the report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children and the Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women - drew attention to violence faced by girls in the educational context. Both studies pointed to the fact that girls are vulnerable to violence and harassment from both teachers and fellow students. The study on violence against women also drew attention to new and emerging forms of violence including "date rape", stalking, and internet and cell-phone violence which can occur in school settings.

Most recently, the Commission on the Status of Women, at its 51<sup>st</sup> session in March 2007, highlighted the steps to be taken to improve girls' education in its agreed conclusions on the "Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child". The Commission urged Governments to, inter alia, promote gender-sensitive and empowering processes and teaching materials; ensure safe, supportive and girl-friendly school environments; develop livelihood skills programmes to reach girls who are not enrolled in formal education programmes; ensure girls' access to training to develop their skills and capacities to exercise leadership; promote and support increased access of girls to ICT; and increase girls' ability to attend school and extra-curricular activities by investing in public infrastructure projects and services, such as transport, water, sanitation and sustainable energy, in order to reduce the domestic work burden for girls, while also working to change attitudes that reinforce the division of labour based on gender in order to promote shared family responsibility for work in the home and reduce.

### **The importance of gender mainstreaming**

In discussing the need to accelerate implementation of the many commitments made on girls' education, I would like to raise the importance of more effectively utilizing the gender mainstreaming strategy. Gender mainstreaming is often forgotten,

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misunderstood, misused and underestimated. It can be an extremely powerful tool if used strategically. It can facilitate the holding of critical actors accountable for the commitments made - governments, the United Nations, bilateral donors and NGOs.

The Beijing Platform for Action identified the need for a dual strategy in

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organizations and individual delegates, and to organize panels or workshops as parallel events. Keeping abreast of and working to influence global processes can make a difference at national level, not least in terms of knowing exactly what specific commitments governments have made at national level and working to hold them accountable.

There are a number of forthcoming key opportunities for advocating for acceleration of change in the area of girls' education. These include the follow-up processes to the outcomes of the Commission on the Status of Women, Security Council resolution 1325, the UN studies on violence against women and violence against children and the concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The fact that the Commission on the Status of Women focused on girls' education in its consideration of the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against girls at its last session provides new entry-points for action. The Commission increasingly highlights the importance of implementation of its recommendations at national level and the sharing of experiences, lessons learned and good practices. Under its new working methods, adopted in 2006, the Commission will come back to review implementation of its agreed conclusions two to three years after their adoption. As a result, around 2010 the Commission will again consider the elimination of discrimination and violence against girls. It will therefore be important that all stakeholders have made concerted efforts to implement the recommendations of the Commission in all areas covered in the agreed conclusions, including girls' education, and can report back on achievements as well as gaps and challenges. NGOs and other stakeholders could play a key role by preparing statistics and materials for this review to keep the issue of girls' education high on the agenda of the Commission. In addition, it would be extremely useful to highlight the issue of girls' education at the forthcoming Commissions rather than waiting for the specific review by, for example, holding parallel events on girls' education at the Commission in 2008 and 2009. UNICEF has been encouraged to do the same and it may be possible for UNICEF and NGOs and other stakeholders, such as Education International, to collaboratively organize highly visible events on girls' education at forthcoming sessions of the Commission.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) also provides important opportunities to bring strategic attention to girls' education. Members of Educational International could use the opportunity of States parties reporting to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to raise critical issues. NGOs prepare shadow report to ensure critical issues are adequately covered in the constructive dialogue the Committee holds with the reporting States party. Collaboration with NGOs in this work could provide an entry-point for getting information on girls' education to the Committee.

The concluding comments of the Committee - where they give specific attention to gaps and challenges in relation to girls' education - also provide an important entry-point. The concluding comments are a tailored set of recommendations for the countries

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reporting to the Committee which highlight the specific priority actions required to ensure the implementation of both the Convention and the Platform for Action. All stakeholders are encouraged to use these concluding comments much more effectively in work at national level. NGOs and other stakeholders can also play a critical role in following up and calling for accountability in this regard.

Other follow-up processes focused on national level which can afford opportunities for bringing increased attention to girls' education include the MDG national reporting process and the follow-up to Poverty Reduction Strategies. Two elements are important in these processes – ensuring greater focus on the inequality in education as an obstacle to achieving the MDGs and eliminating poverty and highlighting the importance of consultation with and participation of women in these processes as decision-makers and as stakeholders.

In addition, the focus on reconstruction and rehabilitation in post-conflict countries in the follow-up to Security Council resolution 1325 provides an important entry-point for girls' education. The enhanced attention to violence against women and violence against children in the follow-up to the studies prepared by the Secretary-General and the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly also afford enhanced opportunities to address the problem of sexual harassment and abuse in school environments and the security risks that reduce the interest of parents in some parts of the world in sending their girls to school.

Let me also mention briefly the importance of the priority theme of the 52<sup>nd</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2008: “Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women”. The Commission will consider the extent to which, and the ways in which, Governments, international organizations and other actors have matched policy commitments on gender equality with resource allocations. This will cover a wide range of issues – public finance management, including gender-responsive budgets; ODA from multilateral and bilateral sources; and new and innovative sources of funding, including funds and foundations, and particularly women's funds for women. The discussion will also focus on gaps and challenges in relation to funding the work in international organizations, in national machineries for the advancement of women at national level, as well as through the women's movement. The consideration of this theme will actively engage a wide range of stakeholders – Member States, the UN, bilateral organizations, regional banks, the private sector, the funds and foundations, and women's groups and networks. It will be important to consider how the critical issues relating to financing for girls' education, particularly in the context of achievement of the MDGS, can be raised strategically at this important meeting next February/March.

I will also take the opportunity to inform you of the priority theme for the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the Commission in 2009, as this is also extremely relevant for your work. The theme will be: “The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS.” The Beijing Platform for Action explicitly recognized that equality between women and men and the empowerment of women is significantly constrained by the unequal sharing of responsibilities in the home, including

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caring roles. Women's access to education and employment, their potential for involvement in decision-making positions in the public sphere, and their opportunities for recreation and sport are hindered by persistent stereotypical attitudes and practices regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men. It will be critical for Education International to be actively involved in these discussions.

**Conclusion: Accelerating closure of the gap between policy and implementation.**

In conclusion, we certainly know e