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*Creating an enabling environment for
girls' and women's participation in education*

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations

The right to education has been recognized in numerous international agreements. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Education for All forums (in 1990 and 2000) and recently, the Millennium Summit in 2000. None however has succeeded in providing equal and widespread access to quality education. Despite the failure of these agreements, every decade or so, governments sign new Conventions capturing the same goal, pushing off the target date (Education for All by 2000, then by 2005 and now by 2015) and claiming to 'renew commitment' to educating all children, especially girls.

In 2000, leaders recognized that getting girls into school was key to achieving all other development objectives, and set the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of gender parity in school ten years in advance of all other targets. Five years later, the failure of over 70 countries to meet this target was largely sidelined at the UN Millennium Summit. This lack of attention raises important questions about the commitment of decision-makers to educating girls and achieving broader gender equality. More than 100 million children remain out of school. Two-thirds (or 57 percent) are girls.¹ Of those enrolled, only 76% of girls actually complete primary school in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa.² These numbers suggest that far too many children, especially girls, do not realise their most basic right to education.

Although international policy initiatives have focused on achieving quantitative goals, getting children into school should not be an end in itself. Schools should not only teach literacy and basic skills, but also be places where children's rights, especially those of girls, are respected and injustices challenged. Learning should be a process that builds confidence and knowledge and facilitates individuals – especially girls who are denied their basic rights – to mobilise and become active agents in negotiating for other rights (i.e. to a decent standard of living, and health). When education promotes this kind of agency, it can enable communities to examine the traditions, cultural norms, and discriminatory practices that perpetuate inequality.

Very few schools consistently provide the type of transformative education that can promote awareness of underlying inequalities and fight the roots of powerlessness, exclusion and discrimination based on sex, race, and socio-economic class. Many continue to reproduce the patriarchal practices, gender biases and discriminatory attitudes that keep this situation alive. For many girls throughout the world, there is still a shortage of schools within safe walking distances from their homes. Many schools continue to operate in disrepair, with crumbling toilets (if they exist for girls) and overcrowded classrooms. There are inadequate number of teachers, desks, chairs, learning and teaching materials. This leaves teachers with the challenge of using child-friendly and interactive techniques in a classroom of 60 pupils.

While these challenges paint an abysmal picture, lessons learned through decades of educational reform, policy experience and civil society activism offer substantial opportunities for change. This paper outlines various factors that need to be addressed in

order for women and girls to access their basic human right to quality education. Creating 'enabling environments' for educating girls and women requires deliberate and unwavering attention to overcoming a host of issues including 1) tackling underlying gender inequalities in society; 2) systemic reform in the education sector itself, and 3) challenging macro trends that negatively impact women's access to and participation in education (as well as health and economic opportunity).

Intedinkage between education, health and the economy

Access to good quality education can provide girls with the tools to exercise their basic rights and access services otherwise denied.

- Educated mothers are more aware of immunization services for their children, which they use 50 percent more often than mothers who have not had education.³ Each additional year of schooling helps women combat infant mortality, which drops by 5 to 10 percent.⁴
- Increased awareness and access to sexual and reproductive health services is important for girls because they comprise 6.1 million of the 10 million young people living with HIV/AIDS.⁵ Yet if all children received primary education, as many as 700,000 cases of HIV could be prevented each year.⁶ Education can also play a critical role in reducing violence against girls and women and enhancing their control over their own bodies.⁷
- With more education women are better able to negotiate the number of children they will have and even delay marriage. Research shows that as women gain four additional years of education, fertility rates drop by one birth⁸ but girls with fewer than seven years of schooling are more likely to be married by age 18.⁹
- Education promotes ownership and control over assets such as land and housing. These provide economic security, incentives for taking economic risks, which lead to growth, and important economic returns including income. These factors are increasingly linked to other problems, including poverty, HIV/AIDS and violence.
- The knowledge, skills and training can facilitate access to formal and decent work and fair wages. Higher levels of education increase the probability that women will engage in formal paid employment.¹⁰ Providing girls with an extra year of education beyond the average boosts eventual wages by 10-20 percent.¹¹
- Education can help women access formal decision making channels and also empower them to fight discrimination and subjugation so they have equal access to resources. Currently only 14 countries have achieved the MDG target of having 30 percent of women in parliament; not one southern country figures among these.¹²

Gender inequality: the root of the problem

If the linkages between education, health and well-being have long been recognized, why do so many girls remain out of school? One reason is that policies have often addressed girls' and women's immediate needs for education without challenging the underlying structures and patriarchal beliefs that reinforce inequality. The different (and unequal) roles, rights and responsibilities that communities and societies consider appropriate for women and men have a strong influence on gender disparity in school enrolment and completion. As long as the most important role of girls is seen to be caretaker, mother and wife, incentive to invest in her education will be low.

Poverty also leaves families with little choices. Since girls' most valued contribution is to the home, they are often withdrawn from school to save money. Even when girls do go to school, they continue to take care of the home and siblings, collect water and fuel. This leaves them little time to do school work and attend classes regularly. When this leads to lower grades, the incentive to send girls to school further plummets. Poor households also rely upon the additional earnings of children to survive. In times of great economic need, girls, like their mothers, play the dual role of caretaker and wage earner, putting in long hours working both in and outside the home, but earning little income. In order to fulfil these roles, girls from poor households are the first to drop out of school and miss out on the education and training that could enable them to have better lives.

The perceived notion that the 'rate of return' for a son's education is greater as they have more opportunities to access better paying jobs raises important questions about the value placed on girls, their right to education and the value of education itself. It also signals the need to change the market economy, which continues to discriminate against women. Although women perform two-thirds of the world's work they earn only one tenth of the income, and own less than one percent of the world's property. Women also constitute up to 75 percent of workers in the shadow economy known as the informal sector, with the vast majority still working in low paying, seasonal and insecure jobs. While we know that good quality education enables countries to achieve the level of economic growth required to tackle poverty, girls and women still lack widespread access to this subsequent benefit of education.

Together, these factors result in girls and women having low decision-making power in the home, community, labour market and government, providing little chance to improve their overall situation and setting the stage for continuing disparities from one generation to the next.

Education systems: in need of transformation

The State is the primary provider of universal education. Many countries have granted the right to education in their Constitution. While this is a first step, it has tended to remain symbolic in nature. The nature and specific content of what this right to education means for girls and boys, the range of government obligations and how citizens can hold the government accountable for failure to fulfil these rights still needs to be strengthened.

Political will needs to be matched with greater commitment and resources so schools can reach all children and provide high quality education. This section reviews a handful of positive measures implemented by governments to ensure girls access education. It also highlights the factors that require greater attention.

Mainstreaming gender equality

Many governments have undertaken efforts to ‘mainstream’ gender perspectives throughout the education system. This means considering both women’s and men’s needs and experiences into design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes. To accomplish this task, governments have created Ministries or Divisions dedicated to enhancing the education of girls and women. While noteworthy, reviews of such units throughout West Africa show that they lack the resources and capacity to bring forth sustained change in education systems. Funding tends to be on a project basis, often provided by donor agencies rather than national governments. As a result, the peace-meal work carried out by these units has on the contrary highlighted the low importance given to educating girls and women.¹³ The further discord between favourable policies for girls’ education and inadequate budget allocation is another example.

Gender disparities do still need to be systematically addressed in policies and programmes. Although special schemes for promoting girls education, such as scholarships and subsidies have proven to be successful, they are largely unsustainable. Other initiatives, such as school feeding programmes and monthly food stipends provide incentive to send girls to school on a regular basis. At the same time, this “exchange” distorts the value of schooling to an economic and subsistence benefit, rather than one that girls should have because it is a fundamental human right to learn. Overall, if schools are accessible, within safe walking distance and provide good quality and relevant education that is free of gender bias, then parents might be more inclined to send their daughters to school (see following section on what kind of school). All these will require more and better allocated resources than are currently available.

Providing adequate resources

Despite commitments to increasing education spending to 6% of GDP, countries in Africa and South and West Asia devote less than 3.5% to education.¹⁴ This overall shortage of resources is a serious concern. Resource strapped governments faced with increasing enrolment rates are left with little choice but to cannibalize the education budget, often reallocating funds and sacrificing special initiatives to provide education to the out of reach and under served, including girls. In this sense, gender-responsive and transparent budgeting has been a useful tool for tracking implementation and funding of government policies on gender and girls.

Careful planning, matched with adequate resources is required to bring good policies to fruition. For example, one of the largest obstacles to girls’ education is cost. Where family economic resources are limited, and parents are still expected to cover school fees and other costs, boys tend to receive preferential treatment for schooling. In some cases, both girls and boys may very well be enrolled in school, but their chances of continuing their education, especially within poor and large families, is dramatically different

because of the value placed on educating girls and the fewer opportunities they can access in the labour market.

Currently 92 out of 192 countries continue to charge fees for education, and parents in every nation (irrespective of the constitutional commitment to free education) bear no less than 22 different types of costs for educating their children.¹⁵ Before eliminating fees, however, governments need to prepare for increases in enrolment by securing resources (from domestic and external sources) to sustain reform, build enough schools, provide learning materials, hire and train additional teachers. In Uganda, Kenya and Malawi, elimination of fees led to 7 million children enrolling in school; it also led to overcrowding of schools and low quality of education, leading to high drop out.

Investing in life long learning

To successfully educate their citizenry, governments will need to investment in the full “Education for All” agenda as there is great interdependence between the different levels of education. Investing in early childhood education is key to making primary schools more effective. Growth in secondary education is essential if primary schooling is not to become a dead end for most children. Women’s literacy and empowerment programmes have a key role to play in ensuring girls are enrolled and retained in school.

Experiences show that mothers that are educated are more likely to ensure their daughters receive schooling. For example, in Niger the probability of children not attending school is 70% where mothers are illiterate. This percentage drops dramatically to 30% when women are able to read easily.¹⁶ At the same time, rallying women around girls’ education is important but not an end to itself. Women should have the opportunity to acquire literacy and other skills. The box below on ‘benchmarks’ of successful programs for adult literacy describes measures to help ensure that “learning” takes place. These strategies can be applied at all levels of schooling.

Benchmarks on adult literacy¹⁷

Adult literacy is the invisible ingredient for eradicating poverty, achieving gender equality and ensuring girls gain access to and succeed in school.

1 Literacy is about acquiring and using reading, writing and numeracy skills, and thereby the development of active citizenship, improved health and livelihoods, and gender equality.

2 Literacy should be seen as a continuous process that requires regular and sustained learning. There are no magic lines to cross.

3 Governments must take the lead responsibility, providing leadership and resources, working in systematic collaboration with civil society, and decentralising budgets and decision-making.

- 4 Governments should invest in ongoing feedback and evaluation mechanisms, data systematization and strategic research.
- 5 Facilitators should be paid at least the equivalent of the minimum wage of a primary school teacher for all hours worked.
- 6 Facilitators should receive substantial initial training and regular refresher training, as well as having opportunities for professional development.
- 7 Facilitators should work with groups of no more than 30 learners and there should be at least one trainer/ supervisor to 15 learner groups.
- 8 Learners in multilingual contexts should be given an active choice about the language in which they learn.
- 9 Learners should be actively stimulated through the use of a wide range of participatory methods and through addressing issues of relevance to their lives.
- 10 Governments should stimulate the market for production and distribution of suitable reading materials and should support production of materials by learners and facilitators.
- 11 Governments should commit between US\$50 and US\$100 per learner per year for at least three years.
- 12 Governments should dedicate at least 3% of their national education sector budgets to adult literacy. International donors should fill any remaining resource gaps.

What kind of school?

Substantial challenges to access remain, such as the availability of schools within safe walking distances and the quality of infrastructure, from toilets for girls, to proper buildings within which to learn and adequate teaching and learning materials. This, combined with the lack of investment in improving the quality and relevance of the school experience has in some countries, leads to a disincentive for education. Strategies employed by schools to overcome these barriers have been successful, and can be improved so learning can be a transformative process and one that actively challenges the underlying gender inequalities in society.

Improvements in the quality and relevance of education have increased the number of years that both girls and boys spend in school. Initiatives to eliminate gender bias in curricula and teaching practices need to go a step further and challenge patriarchal attitudes that reproduce social inequalities. They need to be complemented by strategies that empower teachers to identify the hidden, discriminatory messages prevalent in their own practices so they can communicate and model concepts of equality, justice and equity in classrooms.

Interactive, child-friendly strategies using gender sensitive techniques and teaching materials can provide people with the awareness and tools to fight discrimination and gender bias. The presence of female teachers has been a motivation to send girls to school, not only because they provide positive role models, but also for reasons of safety. However, whether male or female, teachers work under increasingly difficult conditions in the classroom. The high teacher/pupil ratio makes it difficult to teach all children and to use interactive, participatory techniques. In addition, low teacher salaries (many times below liveable wages) force many teachers out of the profession or to take up additional employment.

Our changing world brings new concerns, challenging schools to continuously adapt and provide information for preventing and treating HIV/AIDS, and creating a culture of peace. Comprehensive approaches to sex education (which includes analysis of gender and power) as opposed to abstinence only models that reinforce traditional roles are essential. Whether for HIV/AIDS or sowing the seeds of reconciliation after conflict, classrooms should provide children the space to question ingrained attitudes, discuss gender issues and examine power systems.¹⁸ Human rights education has been particularly successful in providing the skills and tools to overcome these challenges.

Findings also show that violence in and around schools has been growing around the world.¹⁹ The high rate of prevalence is partly due to the denial that abuse and violence exists in wider society. The threat of sexual violence significantly impedes girls' access to education, especially when the schools are far from home. Girls are also faced with sexual harassment in the school environment by education staff, teachers and male students. This exacerbates vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, especially in a school environment, where the prevalence rate is very high and young girls are the most vulnerable. This often leads to girls' poor performance in school, which further invites corporal punishment and public shaming by school authorities and teachers, perpetuating the cycle of absenteeism, low self-esteem and violence at home and in schools. Many strategies have been formulated, from working with the government to enacting law against violence, to training teachers and identifying those that commit the crimes, and working with communities to address the underlying gendered causes of violence.

An enabling environment: changing the global macroeconomic order

A number of macro-level trends need to be challenged for the way they widen disparities and access to resources and opportunity, especially for women. Many are promoted by richer Northern countries and their corporations but deeply impact education systems in the global South. The trends include rapid privatisation, decreasing foreign aid for education, donor conditionality and trade liberalisation. They raise fundamental concerns of democracy, political voice, power, exclusion and control – all of which are mirrored through gender relations in society.

Preserving education as a public good

Private schools are mushrooming around the world. In India, the number of private schools has grown six-fold whilst the number of Government or public schools decreased

by 10% in the period from 1970-2002.²⁰ This is partly because of lack of resources for public education, the emergence of multiple providers and the open market system. Rapid privatisation has also been insisted upon by the World Bank in many of its education programmes in the name of ‘efficiency’ and quality and has become an explicit criterion in IMF loans. However, it has more often than not, increased inequity in access and achievement, isolated vulnerable populations and eroded the capacity of the state to provide equal access to high quality education. The privatisation of public services is often undertaken without adequate consideration of issues of equitable access, affordability, coverage, quality and effects on public service provision for the poor. The notion of public education is slowly disappearing as multiple providers offer differing (not always good) quality of education to those that can afford to pay and the ‘outsourcing’ of education to foreign firms via trade agreements has brought into question what education is for and for whom it is accessible.

Increasing resources for education

Conservative estimates suggest that achieving universal primary completion by 2015 will cost \$5.6 billion in new aid per year – if governments are able to correspondingly increase their investments in education at the same time. The real costs may well be much higher. However, trends in foreign aid for primary education reveal that external funding for education is inconsistent, insufficient, unpredictable and unequally allocated; rendering developing countries’ promotion of sustainable education reform virtually impossible. To date there has been little, if any, serious progress towards addressing this resource gap, despite the high-profile official donors’ pledge in Dakar in 2000 to provide adequate resources to any country with a viable plan to achieve EFA.²¹ Only five of the 22 major donors - none from the seven most powerful nations - have met the 0.07 % target.²² While the \$48 billion in new aid pledged by G8 leaders in July 2005 appears to be a step forward, it is still far from clear how much of this sum, if any, will support education. Currently, the bulk of funding provided by donors is used for infrastructure, learning materials and training, and not on schools, children or recurrent costs such as teacher salaries.²³

Eliminating donor conditionality

As the previous sections of this paper have shown, increasing overall resources to education is only half the battle. Progressive policies that provide equal access to quality education for all children are equally important. However, the range of conditionalities imposed onto governments in the global South make both increasing resources and implementing progressive policies difficult. Conditionality, or terms of aid imposed upon countries by donor agencies, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund cover a range of issues, from education to monetary and fiscal policy.

There are those related to education itself – such as pressure by the World Bank to decentralize, privatise, outsource production and distribution of textbooks, and hire para teachers. The motivation of these policies is dwindling state capacity, weak infrastructure and lack of resources, all of which create “inefficiency”, and thus new avenues should be explored to provide widespread education. While these factors are partially true, the missing link is the role of the IFI’s in creating these situations, primarily through the

Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1980's and the impact of these new policies on widening gender and socio-economic disparities in accessing education.

Underlying these sector specific policies are the monetary and fiscal limits placed on countries by the IMF in an effort to ensure they are macroeconomically stable. These begin with the goal to bring inflation down to single-digit levels, followed by strict limitations placed on the national budget, the public sector wage bill, fiscal deficits, aid levels, and prioritization of debt repayment along with pressures to liberalise trade.²⁴ These policies consequently prohibit countries from adopting the ambitious and expansionary monetary policies required to create the fiscal space for increasing spending on education to levels required to educate all children.²⁵

However, there are substantial 'grey areas' within which economists say countries can operate. They can substantially expand their spending on education, health and other social sectors while ensuring they do not go into hyperinflation, incur unmanageable debt and large fiscal deficits. These progressive policies would require expanding the tight macroeconomic norms, an arena that the IMF is reluctant to promote. As a result, decisions about public resources and basic services are taken out of the hands of governments.

These policies place governments in an impossible situation. Countries struggle to provide education to all children as mandated in their Constitutions and agreed upon in international Conventions, and at the same time, adhere to restrictive economic and fiscal policies that hamper their ability to increase spending. Given these contradictions, countries find it difficult to implement progressive reforms such as:

- Eliminating user fees – how can the 92 countries that currently charge fees (introduced by SAPs in the 1980s) afford to eliminate fees and correspondingly build more schools, classrooms and hire more trained teachers when they have a strict budget restriction? Many countries like Kenya have recently eliminated user fees. In 2003, this measure brought over 1.5 million children to schools. Classrooms became flooded, boasting 60-100 students per teacher. Quality dropped as did many children, out of school. Despite the desperate need to increase spending on education and in particular hire more teachers, Kenya had to leave over 60,000 trained teachers unemployed due to IMF budgetary caps.²⁶
- Expanding the education budget when countries are continuously forced to prioritize the repayment of debt, which in many cases was incurred by unelected and corrupt leaders? Present debt reduction strategies such as the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiatives have not gone far enough to alleviate debt. Tanzania, a participating HIPC country, is struggling to implement a plan to provide free education while it continues to pay out \$434 million in debt servicing.²⁷ This amount equals the financing gap for primary education.
- Providing education of high quality when the hiring of teachers and their remuneration is controlled by the IMF, their contracts and conditions of work

influenced by World Bank policies of para teachers. Sierra Leone, a post-conflict country struggling to reconstruct itself, has agreed to decrease its wage bill from 8.4% of GDP to 5.8% of GDP by 2008. In 2003, with the 25,000 ceiling already met, only 3,000 of the 8,000 teachers needed were hired.²⁸ As a result, parents are covering the cost of community teachers despite the availability of trained teachers. In order to cut costs and meet the budget caps agreed upon with the IMF and hire enough teachers, countries are turning to contract teachers. Andhra Pradesh State in India has over 35,000 such teachers.²⁹ These teachers are not professionally trained, offered a third of the salaries with no job security. They have no right to collective bargaining or to form unions, thereby tied to unfair wages and working conditions. The quality of education is dwindling, leading more children to drop out.

- Raising adequate revenue from trade taxes when the IMF explicitly includes as one of its loan conditions trade liberalisation. Liberalisation has been introduced without sufficient concern for the loss of government revenue in countries where the need for stable and higher revenue streams is critical. Low-income countries collect the bulk of their revenues (approximately 22.5%) from import and export taxes.^{30, 31} If tariffs are reduced or eliminated, as advocated by new World Trade Organization agreements, then countries will lose this source of income all together. In most low-income countries where trade tariffs have been reduced, the lost income has not been recovered and the ability of countries to collect taxes from other sources remains limited in part due regressive tax systems and very low income tax base.³²

There are several underlying problems with this global macroeconomic order, which operates to the disadvantage of the global South, women and the poor. These policies, promoted for their benefits to macroeconomic stability, have not spurred economic growth nor have they reduced poverty. Most of the opportunities created by these policies have been accessible to only a few. For the poor, marginalized, and particularly women, costs have increased for basic services including education, health and water. The burden to care for families has multiplied and economic opportunities are increasingly limited to low paying, dead end jobs under poor working conditions. The opportunity for girls and women to access education and use the skills to improve their lives is constrained by the overall macroeconomic system and institutions which operate within.

Space to negotiate alternative policies is drastically limited, albeit the debate among economists and social scientists around the validity of these exceptionally low macroeconomic targets. The IMF continues to maintain a level of hegemonic control over discourse, particularly within Ministries of Finance and Central Banks in the global South. If a country deviates from its monetary and fiscal targets, the IMF can effectively 'switch off' all foreign aid flows (as done in Zambia and Honduras), thereby jeopardizing progress and achievement of education. This level of control raises issues of democracy, political voice and control over national decision-making.

The net effect of all of these is that it becomes impossible for countries to ensure that education plays an equalising force in society. The potential for education to contribute to transforming gender relations is undermined because the resources required to do this are

simply not available or their allocation is based on international macroeconomic frameworks rather than national goals. In order for change to happen, countries must explore alternative economic policies so they can spend more on special initiatives and policies that systematically address the underlying gender inequalities that keep girls out of school.³³

Mobilising public pressure

Despite the power of the world economic order and influence of global trends on national decision-making, the responsibility to provide universal basic education rests with the State. In end, governments do make clear decisions, or go along with imposed obligations. Citizens have a right to hold their governments accountable for these policies.

Parents have effectively advocated for increased access to schools, improved classrooms, accountability of schools and teachers to communities and monitored achievement levels through Parent Teacher Associations and School Management Committees. The participation of women in these groups has particularly been an important factor leading to increased enrolment and retention of girls. The activism of children and young people in schools has also led to positive changes in community attitudes towards girls' education, increased involvement of parents, communities, teachers and local education authorities. These noteworthy efforts need to be coupled with continued pressure to reform education systems and challenge privatization so schools can both respond to the unique challenges of girls and marginalized groups and provide free, quality education.

The world economic order, global trends and failure of universal basic education creates new advocacy targets for civil society. Advocacy must take on a new meaning and move beyond sharing information and "mobilizing" people to build the skills, confidence, political consciousness, and organization needed for long-term change.

For this, NGOs have been a useful ally for bringing citizens together to advocate for education as a domestic political priority and for maintaining pressure on governments to ensure public schools work effectively. Advocates in Africa, Asia and Latin America are working to construct vibrant movements, incorporating broad popular coalitions from citizens, to NGOs and teachers unions. Every year, a "global week of action" supported by the Global Campaign for Education³⁴ unites citizens around the world to pressure the international community and governments to fulfil their promises to provide free, compulsory public basic education for all children, in particular girls and those out of school. These struggles are producing valuable lessons about linking policy change efforts with citizen participation, framing education demands in terms of human rights and clarifying the significant but often hidden impacts of economic and trade frameworks. The involvement of women's rights activists and organizations is an essential next step to expanding these coalitions and ensuring that they include the voices of all citizens.

Transforming the culture of politics

The interplay of global trends and emerging forces with basic services highlight the need to refine political strategies to emphasize the active citizenship and constituency-building needed to hold governments and other powerful institutions accountable. Some ideas include:

- Engaging in empowering processes that build consciousness and active citizenship about the right to high quality education
- Re-politicising education and confront the conservative, neo liberal agenda of privatisation and disinvestment in public education
- Refocusing on what education is really for by creating schools that are democratic, accountable, just and transformative
- Promoting more complex and nuanced understanding of the causes and symptoms of poverty, lack of rights and gender inequality
- Engaging in advocacy as a political process that involves coordinated efforts in changing existing practices, ideas and distribution of power and resources that exclude women and other disadvantaged groups
- Building stronger alliances between education campaigners and the women's movement to ensure that they take on a full gender analysis in all their work.

While education is often invoked as the foundation of democracy, the reality is that both concepts appear to be shrinking to the status of commodities. 'Democracy' needs to be rediscovered through the equal participation of both women and men and their collaboration in finding alternative ways of doing politics and challenging us to think clearly about gaps in education, our strategies and how they can tackle the underlying inequities in society. The role of women needs to expand and grow into these decision-making channels so that attitudes and behaviours that cause inequality and exacerbate poverty can be effectively challenged.

Conclusion

There is a close interrelationship between the well-being of girls of women and their ability to access education, health services, and decent work. Education is a necessary, but insufficient condition for enabling women's participation in development. Unless the type of learning provided is relevant and empowers individuals to challenge gender bias and discrimination, education may not lead to change. The paper argues that what is really needed is a revolution of minds and power systems. It also argues that people, along with institutions and the policies and mechanisms they produce, need to be transformed. To achieve sustained and meaningful change, we need to re-envision the way we view learning and the value that we place on measuring progress in education. Current quantitative goals such as gender parity in schooling and international Conventions need to be complemented by work to alter systems of power that operate to limit girls' and women's right to education.

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³⁰ Fernandez de Cordoba, S., et al., 2004, *Blend it like Beckham – Trying to read the ball in the WTO negotiations on industrial tariffs*. Draft 10 May 2004, forthcoming in "The World Economy".

³¹ In South Asia, international trade taxes make up 37% of total government revenue; for sub-Saharan Africa it is 27%.

³² Baunsgaard, T., and Keen, M., 2004, *Tax Revenue and (or?) trade liberalization*. Fiscal Affairs Division, International Monetary Fund.

³³ For a list of alternative and viable economic options See Rowden, R., 2005 *Changing Course: Alternative Approaches to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals and Fight HIV/AIDS*. ActionAid International USA.

³⁴ www.campaignforeducation.org