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إيسيسكو
ICESCO

ICESCO Education Ministers Conference

ICESCO EMC 3

Beyond Transforming
Education Summit:
from Commitments to Actions

2.2

Status of Girls' Education

Muscat,
Sultanate of Oman

2-3
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Context

The Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) pays special attention to girls' education issues, considering the educational, economic and socio-cultural challenges that hinder the provision of equal educational opportunities for all girls. ICESCO has been keen in its strategies and implemented plans to support the relevant efforts of Member States through an approach focusing the concerns of specialized national authorities, adapting plans to local needs, and building bilateral and multilateral partnerships to ensure innovative and effective solutions and comprehensive services in its relevant programs and initiatives through which the Organization strives to ensure optimal leveraging of successful experiences and best practices in educational and pedagogical institutions.

In this context, and in an endeavor to make an accurate scientific diagnosis of the status of girls' education in the Arab and Islamic worlds, ICESCO, in cooperation with the Arab Women Organization, conducted a number of scientific field, analytical and comparative studies and research on the status of girls' education in fifteen (15) countries, namely the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the Republic of Türkiye, the Republic of Tunisia, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Republic of Iraq, the Republic of Lebanon, Malaysia, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Kingdom of Morocco, the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Republic of Yemen.

With a view of enriching this scientific diagnosis of the status of girls' education in the Arab and Islamic worlds and capitalize on its results, ICESCO, in cooperation with the Arab Women Organization, held an international scientific symposium on "The Status of Girls' Education in the Arab and Islamic Worlds" at ICESCO headquarters, in Rabat, on 17-19 April 2024. Experts, educational officials, university professors, researchers and those interested in women's issues, particularly girls' education, from 16 Arab and Islamic countries participated in the symposium, namely the Kingdom of Bahrain, the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the Republic of Türkiye, the Republic of Tunisia, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Republic of the Sudan, the Republic of Iraq, the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Palestine, the Republic of Lebanon, Malaysia, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Kingdom of Morocco, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and the Republic of Yemen.

This international scientific symposium aimed at: Putting education for all girls at the forefront of educational priorities; highlighting the commonalities and local peculiarities in the reality of girls' and women's education in the Arab and Islamic worlds; providing the necessary knowledge and tools to stakeholders in the field of girls' education and enhancing cooperation with them; in addition to consulting with policy makers, decision-makers and regional partners in order to create a strategic database aimed at developing a regional agenda to ensure



the right of girls to education, build a network of international and national influencers and various stakeholders to participate in a constructive and continuous dialogue leading to greater progress towards providing all girls with access to education. This will help to make up for the noticeable delay due to the Covid-19 pandemic and other factors within the commitments made by our countries to provide equal educational opportunities for all by 2030. The educational empowerment of women and girls is one of the requirements for the advancement of our societies to keep up with the latest developments. This can be achieved only through the development of educational policies in accordance with the principles of equity, quality, equality and inclusiveness, and the translation of policies into practices that ensure the right of all girls to join the educational system and obtain a quality education, and the promotion of their education as a key pillar of the global commitment to achieve the fourth Sustainable Development Goal on education.

The symposium also reviewed a number of comparative studies on the reality of girls' education in the Arab and Islamic worlds through comparative reports based on documented national data of research samples from the educational systems of fifteen countries. The reports examined the gender gaps in the educational systems and the educational opportunities in these countries. The comparative reports also considered the gender differences in school education, the protection of the educational rights of girls and women in national legal regulations and social norms. Besides, the reports focused on the obstacles that deprive girls of their right to education in the Arab and Islamic countries, and included statistics to highlight gender disparities in school enrolment, as well as examples of social norms and practices that prevent girls from enrolling in school.



The seminar also discussed a set of factors affecting the reality of girls' education, most notably the economic effects of depriving girls in the Arab and Islamic worlds of their right to education, girls' education from the perspective of Islam, the shift in the mindset of families and society towards girls' education, public policies to promote girls' education, gender stereotypes in school curricula, and the challenges facing girls' education in situations of war and crises.

As a result of this international scientific symposium and the relevant scientific studies and research, ICESCO and the Arab Women Organization launched an initiative that includes a set of future guidelines for girls' education in the Islamic world towards ensuring quality, equitable and inclusive education for all, especially girls, in our Member States, and integrating gender equality and empowerment of girls and women into education plans. The guidelines are based on the fact that education is a basic human right that everyone should equally enjoy and an investment and an essential pillar for achieving the desired development and desired prosperity. These guidelines also draw on gender equality as a fundamental human right and a necessary basis for building sustainable societies.

Given the constant changes that has been shaping education to keep up with changes and meet the emerging needs of societies and countries, the need for constant change and development of education in the modern time is more urgent than ever to make it more efficient, equal, equitable, inclusive, sustainable and flexible. Since the process of transforming education has been set in motion, these guidelines seek to rebuild education differently in order to have good, inclusive and equitable educational systems that are more responsive, convenient and flexible to meet the needs of all.

The dimensions of the proposed future guidelines for girls' education in the Islamic world are as follows: adopting gender equality in education as a strategic indicator for girls' education, allocating greater support to girls' education, planning for supporting girls' education, qualified and competent teachers and school leaders, advanced curricula, inclusive learning environments, strong partnership and coordinated and concerted efforts to promote girls' education, informed and supportive public opinion to promote girls' education, good governance, and periodic follow-up on girls' education.



1. Adoption of gender equality in education as a strategic indicator of girls' education

It is unacceptable under any title or pretext to turn a blind eye to any gender inequalities in education. Since there is still a long way to go to achieve gender equality in and through education, we are called upon to intensify efforts and accelerate action to achieve this equality, **which entails:**

- Supporting the efforts of governments in achieving gender equality in educational opportunities, through the development of plans supported by resources and budgets that meet the principle of equal gender opportunities, transparency and social protection interventions, in partnership with the private sector and civil society institutions;
- Leveraging all available legal means to promote the concept of equal gender opportunities and introduce appropriate amendments to national legal legislations within the constitutional framework of each country to ensure the right to equal education and provide equal educational opportunities for girls and boys.
- Adopting policies that address gender-based discrimination and ensure wider participation of women in economic, social and cultural activities. This is reflected in the teaching process, particularly through teachers' interactions towards their male and female students, as well as the adoption of methods and mechanisms likely to change stereotypes of social roles in educational curricula.
- Developing a five-year regional action plan to intensify national efforts to achieve the



equality of educational opportunities for all, i.e. for male and female children without exception by 2030, exchange experiences and consultation among countries through ICESCO.

- Expanding the indicators of gender equality in education, not limiting such indicators to achieving access to basic education only, but also ensuring transition to and completion of secondary education, and providing conditions for girls to complete vocational, technical and university education.
- Addressing the root causes of gender inequalities, including discriminatory social norms, attitudes and practices.
- Addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization as well as all inequalities in accessing educational opportunities.



2. Allocating more support for girls' education

Many girls face various obstacles to their education that may be attributable to poverty, cultural norms and practices, or poor infrastructure, violence and fragility. In this regard, girls' education must be given a high priority and the necessary support so that girls can receive education opportunities likely to improve their capacities and take into account their needs. **This entails the following:**

- Focusing on girls' education and placing it at the top of the national priorities in such a way as to give an impetus for achieving tangible progress in girls' education.
- Reconsidering the methods of preparing budgets for the education sector and their efficiency and adopting a system based on planning, programming and performance evaluation, which contributes to improving the response of these budgets to the principle of equal gender opportunities, and increasing the budget ratios related to the development of e-learning and digital transformation, thereby enhancing the capacities and skills of girls.
- Developing a roadmap for social protection interventions as means to address obstacles to girls' education in the Islamic world.
- Calling on governments and donors to provide financial support and social assistance to poor families experiencing difficulties in securing education costs for girls. Such assistance can include scholarships, cash grants, food aid and health care.
- Reducing the cost of education through direct practical measures such as reducing fees, providing scholarships, providing free meals, providing back-to-school facilities for those who dropped out (especially girls) with remedial courses, reducing the distance between school and place of residence, providing transportation or compensation for it.
- Providing psychological and social support to girls suffering from the effects of poverty, conflict and social challenges, through the provision of mentoring, training and



psychological support programs to help strengthen their self-confidence and realize their full potential, in cooperation and coordination between governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society.

3. Planning in support of girls' education

Improving girls' education requires sound scientific planning that sets goals and outlines ways to achieve them. **This entails the following:**

- Undertaking initiatives to reform the educational system by reformulating and developing educational strategies, plans and curricula in line with the diverse societal roles of women.
- Intensifying international and regional efforts to chart the way for the Girls' Education Promotion Strategy by 2040.
- Developing plans to help improve the enrolment rates of girls in education and training sector, and preparing programs for the reintegration of school-dropout male and female children into the educational system, in cooperation with international organizations and relevant institutions in this field.
- Adopting the school map method in building schools, in order to facilitate girls' access to schools.
- Creating effective systems for data collection, monitoring and evaluation, so that better information is available that helps planning, implementation and follow-up with a sound scientific approach.
- Building the capacities of statistical, data collection, monitoring and analysis staff, with a focus on making sex-disaggregated data available at all levels, to reach all girls, especially those affected by crises, and identify their needs in order to achieve learning goals in the context of emergencies and conflicts.

4. Qualified and competent teachers and school leaders

The decisive factor in the development of girls' education is the human element, which should be well-qualified to honestly and optimally fulfil the desired roles. Hence, it is important to equip teachers and school leaders with the necessary competencies to educate girls. **Below are the mechanisms to be implemented to enable teachers and school leaders to carry out their tasks in girls' education:**

- Taking measures to ensure that teachers assume their proper role, providing them with appropriate material and moral support, and creating conditions to allow them to work effectively.
- Developing pre-professional teacher training programs and professional development programs for teachers and school leaders in the service; focusing on skills that enable them to improve girls' education, achieve gender equality in education, and enable girls to enjoy their educational opportunities well.
- Providing means to ensure that teachers and school leaders have opportunities to participate in the educational decision-making process.

5. Advanced educational curricula

Girls education goes beyond just enrolling them in school, it also consists in providing them with the necessary skills and abilities to access the labor market, learn the social, emotional and life skills necessary to cope with a rapidly changing world, make life decisions, and contribute to their communities and the whole world. **Accordingly, the following measures need to be taken:**

- Developing educational curricula in line with with the multiple societal roles played by women and the social changes.
- Using critical and analytical thinking skills and innovation in promoting gender equality in the school curriculum.

• Providing intensive training for educational staff, rehabilitating those responsible for developing curricula in the field of gender equality and equal opportunities, and expanding women's economic empowerment programs, especially in rural communities.

- Building the capacities of the representatives of the ministries of education and the curriculum directorates in such a way as to enhance the image of women and their roles in society and combat all forms of discrimination against them.
- Ensuring that curricula, textbooks and learning materials reinforce positive messages about gender equality and support the right of girls to quality education on an equal basis with boys.
- Incorporating all the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in the education curricula to achieve a smooth transition towards the professions of the future and provide suitable job opportunities for all.
- Adopting modern technology and artificial intelligence applications in educational systems, leveraging digital skills, and the mechanisms of their use by teachers and students.

6. Inclusive learning environments for all

The learning environment plays a pivotal role in achieving educational goals at all stages of education. With a view to allowing girls to optimally enjoy their right to education, supportive learning environments must be developed, which necessitates:

- Taking all possible measures to ensure that the educational institutions' environments, both physically and psychologically, remain accessible to all and conducive to learning and equality.
- Steadily improving the quality of the educational environment elements, and ensuring equal opportunities for all to have access to quality education.
- Creating a learning environment to



accommodate digital transformation and engage in an educational system benefiting from technological innovations, so as to provide equal and quality education opportunities for all.

- Calling on governments and the international community to provide further financing for education and improve its efficiency in such a way as to meet the requirements of the development of education, the promotion of girls' education and the achievement of gender equality in education.

7. Strong partnership and coordinated and concerted efforts to promote girls' education

The desired advancement of girls' education requires an approach based on partnership, synergy and solidarity, which facilitates participatory action **to join the efforts of all parties involved in girls' education through the following:**

- Coordinating and unifying the efforts of international bodies, humanitarian organizations and educational centers to promote girls' education.
- Identifying all partners likely to contribute to the advancement of girls' education,



finding clear communication channels and ensure comprehensive coordination with them according to their respective areas of interest and contribution.

- Collaborating with stakeholders to identify the areas where girls are most in need and most affected by crises, and provide them with the necessary support.
- Strengthening global solidarity to reduce gender inequality in education and promote girls' empowerment to take their opportunities in quality education.

8. Informed and supportive public opinion for the advancement of girls' education

Achieving real progress in girls' education requires a supportive environment based on an informed public opinion about girls' right to education. Hence, we can instill trust in the productivity of girls' education and its precious benefits for the whole society. **Accordingly, the following actions should be taken:**

- Raising awareness of the importance of girls' education, as a human right and a basis for the empowerment of women, and its key role in economic and social development through awareness-raising campaigns and educational programs for communities, families and girls themselves through conventional and modern media and other means and mechanisms to enhance the value of education and achieve gender equality.
- Launching initiatives at the national level, especially in rural and remote areas, to overcome all cultural attitudes that prevent girls from continuing their education and entrench discrimination.
- Increasing the social demand for education in general and for female education in particular, and seeking to maximize the desire to enroll in education, considering its cultural, social and economic importance.
- Improving the use of both conventional and communicative media in promoting interest in

girls' education and changing the stereotype about women.

9. Good Governance and periodic follow-up on girls' education

The sustainability of girls' education development needs a general action framework guided by good governance standards and always committed to periodic scientific follow-up. **Here, the following actions should be taken:**

- Taking effective measures for the good governance of girls' education.
- Promoting transparency and accountability of the parties involved in girls' education.
- Developing a gradual verification mechanism by 2030 through periodic reports on the rates of progress, identifying difficulties and finding ways to overcome them.

Conclusion

ICESCO and the Arab Women Organization affirm that ensuring quality education for all girls without exception is one of the main pillars for achieving the desired sustainable development. In this regard, the two organizations adopt a strongly supportive approach to enable girls, especially those suffering from vulnerability, poverty and deprivation, to access quality education, develop their skills and abilities for continuous self-development to assume various future roles based on initiative, leadership, improvement of life quality and a greater contribution to the development of society as a whole. The guidelines and visions contained in this document are a contribution from ICESCO and the Arab Women Organization to identify priorities for action at the Arab and Islamic levels within an initiative outlining future guidelines for the advancement of girls' education in Member States to serve as a helpful guide in the development of policies and building strategies and plans to promote girls' education in the Islamic world.

Driven by its civilizational mission, and in cooperation and coordination with the competent authorities in Member States, ICESCO will exert every effort to facilitate the use of these guidelines and support Member States' efforts to accelerate the progress of achieving the fourth Sustainable Development Goal on education, and maximize interest in providing quality education for all girls, in response to the attention given to this goal, which has seven outcome targets, six of which mainly focus on girls and women education, equal educational opportunities and gender equality. For example, the first outcome target aims at: "ensuring that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education..." and fifth outcome target aspires to "eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training..."









     
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