



Foreign &
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Wilton Park



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Report

Diplomacy to mobilise momentum for girls' education

Wednesday 4 – Friday 6 July 2018 | WP1628

In association with:



SOAS
University of London
— 100 Years —

Centre for
International Studies
and Diplomacy



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Summary

How can diplomacy, and the UK's new diplomatic focus, mobilise momentum for girls' education? This was the question that brought together different actors from a variety of sectors to advance the global campaign for girls' education, and identify ways to utilise the tools that diplomacy can offer to improve access to education for girls across the world.

Diplomacy has the potential to significantly enhance global efforts for girls' education, which if successful would result in significant social and economic benefits for girls, their families and their communities leading to healthier, wealthier and more sustainable societies.

Some of the highlights included:

- Tackling the current barriers to girls accessing education requires a multinational and multidimensional approach and partnerships between governments, the private sector and most importantly, the communities in which girls live;
- Diplomacy can draw attention to international campaigning efforts, and point to the political and financial commitments needed by national governments, as well as the broader partnerships needed with communities and the private sector;
- The use of the UK's diplomacy in support of girls' education builds on what many recognise as the UK's existing leadership of education policy and funding particularly of primary education in many developing countries;
- Diplomatic levers can provide alternative avenues beyond those that others campaigning for girls' education can usually access, for example through conversations with political leaders who can influence change to national education policy and provision;
- However, there are potential gaps and risks of diplomacy in support of girls' education:
 - The education sector internationally is fragmented and under-resourced;

- Fulfilling the ambition of 12 years of quality education requires examining: the best evidenced approaches and which to adopt; which stages of an education system to support and how; how to support secondary education; how to include skills and non-formal routes to employment and self-employment;
- Building sustainability into a diplomatic approach, which joins up with other government levers, including development support, is crucial;
- Getting the balance right between what individual diplomatic missions can do, and building expertise locally, will be key.
- Using the entry point of a discussion about girls' education can also open doors for more difficult diplomatic conversations on bilateral and international issues.

Ten policy recommendations to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) for a successful diplomatic campaign:

- I. Utilise the advantages of its unique position – as the FCO is not an education ministry, it is able to look broadly at the issue beyond the classroom;
- II. Create an overarching girls-centered strategy focused on building an ecosystem that allows girls to learn and is driven by a holistic understanding of girls' issues that intersect with the challenge of accessing a quality education. This strategy should be guided by:
 - girls' empowerment on issues of health and sanitation, nutrition, security, etc;
 - a gender-responsive plan that places girls at the centre of the broader community;
 - championing of girls' voices.
- III. Brand without tokenism', position education as a universal human right but also clearly make the economic and social case for girls' education specifically;
- IV. Monitoring and Evaluation: Identify at a national level what the current level and quality of girls' education is. Work with countries to identify:
 - one thing that is going well, and reinforce it;
 - one thing that is an easy fix (or quick win), and achieve it;
 - one hard challenge, and work to address the barriers.
- V. Mobilise private sector engagement to support diplomatic efforts;
- VI. Adopt a life cycle approach to stay focused on continuous education from year one;
- VII. Build a coalition with the FCO at the centre. The role of the FCO is central to creating a strong UK case for resourceful aid on girls' education and a coalition could be achieved from the engagement of a wider range of stakeholders:
 - through a 'coalition from within': persuade different HMG departments to prioritise girls' education from a variety of different perspectives (economy, trade, health, environment) in speeches and meetings wherever possible, as well as in budget planning;
 - internationally: influence current and upcoming multilateral gatherings and discussions on girls' education (such as achieved at the G7);
 - cross-sectoral actors: build and develop cross-sector engagement between civil society, private sector and teachers' unions;

- VIII. Rethink current resourcing mechanisms to favour a more programmatic and holistic approach to campaigning, to support long-term approaches rather than approaches which may be short-term or based on election cycles;
- IX. Alongside the Department for International Development (DFID), reconsider development aid expenditure allocation to
- prioritise girls' education;
 - avoid funding in a scattered manner across countries, NGOs and IGOs; instead favour a dedicated international programme serving both humanitarian and education purposes (for example Education Cannot Wait)
 - build in resource for accountability and monitoring for girls' education;
- X. Develop a communication strategy to address scepticism of UK development aid both domestically and internationally:
- acknowledge there is both an economic benefit of educating girls and an economic cost of not educating them;
 - reframe the message according to the audience and package communications so they resonate better, utilising communications to answer the question of any key audience 'what is in it for me?';
 - get like-minded donors to amplify the message;
 - use influential figures (local/national/international) which match the audience you are seeking to persuade.

Introduction

In association with the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy (CISD) at SOAS University of London, Wilton Park hosted a dialogue focused on building further momentum to improve girls' education. Its aim was to produce recommendations for a transnational collaborative campaign to support the United Kingdom's call for 12 years of quality education for every girl. Drawing on best practices from other transnational campaigns, discussion focused on maximising opportunities for partnership and collaboration around the new diplomatic focus.

During the discussions one key issue emerged: effectively tackling the barriers to girls' education requires a multidimensional approach through various partnerships between governments, the private sector and most importantly, the communities in which the girls live.

A focus on girls' education

Education is central to a girl's development and empowerment. Beyond developing basic literacy and numeracy skills, education enables girls to make better choices about their health, equips them to effectively engage in a changing world and ultimately transforms their lives and the communities they live in. However, UNESCO estimates globally more than 130 million girls between the age of six and 17 are out of school and 15 million primary school girls will never have access to education.

Ensuring more girls have access to quality education has become a development priority. It is the key to achieving many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): no poverty (SDG 1), good health and wellbeing (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and reduced inequalities (SDG 10). Using partnerships to achieve the goals (SDG 17), as well as international engagement and cooperation will be crucial to make quality education a reality for girls worldwide.

“It’s not education in isolation, but alongside healthcare and poverty”

Promoting a holistic approach to girls’ education

1. Girls’ education has been called the ‘philosophers’ stone’- a pathway to healthier, wealthier and more sustainable societies. Educated women are 50% more likely to immunise their children. For every 10% more girls in school, GDP increases by 3%.
2. However, a clear message and rationale is needed as to why the focus is on girls’ education in particular, recognising that in some contexts, boys are doing worse than girls.
3. Creating an enabling environment for girls to access quality education is critical. Gender interacts with other types of disadvantages, including poverty, region and a mother’s level of education. There may be no one factor that leads to a girl dropping out of school. Consequently, a holistic approach is required that looks at meeting girls’ basic needs outside school, as well as creating a girl-friendly environment within schools.
4. Interventions must be both targeted to remove barriers or discriminatory circumstances, but also systemic to ensure that girls in school have opportunities to learn, progress, and find meaningful work when they finish.

Getting the basics right

5. A holistic approach means tackling the practical issues that prevent girls from going to school. Participants identified a number of practical issues that need to be addressed outside the classroom. For example:
 - i. The school’s proximity matters. Lack of proximity also raises issues of access for disabled girls;
 - ii. The safety of both passage and premises matters; engaging with existing social structures to organise a community-walk programme and ensuring adequate training/vetting for teachers would go some way to addressing that challenge;
 - iii. Hygiene and sanitation can be a crucial barrier. Some schools do not have ablution facilities for girls and, if coming from economically challenged backgrounds, sanitary pads are a luxury. Engaging the private sector to provide reusable sanitary wear, and supporting authorities to ensure that all schools have the basic facilities for girls would contribute to improving the attendance and quality of education for girls;
 - iv. Nutrition can also be a barrier. Hungry students will not go to school, or if they do, they may have trouble concentrating. Families will often prioritise feeding boys over girls.
6. Support services, including mentoring opportunities for girls and even counselling services for family members were highlighted as a key to ensuring that the girls’ education would be prioritised and encouraged in patriarchal communities.
7. Affordability matters; if the cost of school is too expensive for a family/community, practice has been that they will educate boys over girls, because educated girls are seen to benefit their future husband’s family, not their own.
8. It is important to recognise the behavioural patterns that culminate in a cycle of poverty and lack of education for girls. This means in some cases girls are married off at a young age and go on to have several children, who are then uneducated and go on to have several more uneducated children, perpetuating the cycle. This must be recognised as a behavioural element to the barriers facing a girl’s access to education. Targeting behavioural change will help to shift the priorities and responsibilities placed on young women and break the cycle.
9. There is a need for a focus on the poorest; governments spend on average four times more on the richest 25 % of the population than the poorest, according to the World Development Report.

“We must really change the mindset of the community; otherwise, education becomes secondary to everything else”

Tackling difficult issues

10. There must be more openness to discuss difficult issues. Challenging social norms which create stigma around issues keeping girls out of school is crucial.
11. Adolescence is a critical moment for girls – there needs to be a frank and open discussion of the impact of the transitions which girls go through at puberty, with comprehensive sexuality education and openness about contraception.
12. Senior government and local officials need to be willing to openly discuss issues such as menstruation and teenage pregnancy that are keeping girls out of school. Policies which seek to exclude pregnant girls, for example, should be challenged.

Working with the community

13. Interventions must not only focus on working with governmental representatives that officially make policy and law, but also with traditional/religious leaders. The buy-in, involvement and ownership of traditional and religious leaders is key to successfully campaigning for girls' education. Community leaders are highly influential and it is showing respect for their values, speaking the same language and building a rapport of mutual trust that builds shared understanding of the benefit for girls' education.
14. Any international campaign on girls' education should not be Western-led but instead empower communities to lead the change. Who are the local custodians for girls' education? A moralistic approach should be avoided and instead engage with local champions who are already working for change, amplifying what they do.
15. The argument should be made in a way that makes sense to the audience, for example, emphasise the benefits of girls' education in economic terms if that is what will resonate.
16. Village level, and even family level diplomacy is imperative for any lasting change. The attitudes of other female figures, such as mothers and grandmothers, can form barriers to a girl accessing education. Acknowledging their influence and evaluating their attitudes will ensure their daughters' or granddaughters' success and support in the classroom. Women should not be political subjects; working with them to form a strategy that will work is key. Engage women in their own attitudes to empowerment.
17. Raising the profile of the teaching profession will assist in empowering teachers and making them feel appreciated, important, and necessary. Teachers carry out and carry on the legacy of education. Initiatives such as the Global Teacher Prize can have long lasting effects.
18. Having a female faculty matters. In patriarchal societies this means that teachers can go into students' homes if need be to help make the case to send their girls to school and help reassure parents that girls will be safe from sexual harassment at school.

A long-term mission

19. A long-term plan is needed; going for the 'low hanging fruit' is not enough. Deadlines do not work well with communities and external organisations should be prepared to work with communities for many decades to ensure lasting change.
20. Longer funding cycles are critical with short-term milestones along the way to ensure continued impetus.
21. There are issues of trust and credibility which will take a long time to solve; the risk of being seen to create new forms of imperialism is high, and only engaged, long-term partnership will start to address this.
22. Perseverance is key. This needs a long-term institutional focus rather than an individually driven campaign.
23. Being accountable to the girl is crucial.

“It’s more than just ‘bums on seats’!”

“The twelve years goal of education is only so good as the quality and employability”

Defining and measuring success for quality girls’ education

24. Measuring success requires both quantitative and qualitative data. Although access has improved, many children are not learning in school. Nigeria, for example, is seeing teacher absence rates of 20%. In Kenya, increased investment into education has failed to improve learning outcomes. Only around 7% of the most economically disadvantaged Indian girls have grasped the basics by age 11.
25. Therefore, it is not enough to just track attendance numbers, but also the quality of individual learning. The challenge for any diplomatic campaign is in clearly defining outcome versus output and impact versus evidence.
26. Ultimately, quality education should lead to employability and transferable skills. Poor families are economically rational; if there is no evidence that educated girls have better life outcomes, they will not prioritise educating their girls. Demonstrating positive impact with clear evidence is key.
27. Assessing learning outcomes, success rates of standardised testing, and tracking a student’s progress and retention rate is more effective than merely counting ‘bums on seats’. There must be ‘the right to life-long learning over the right to education’ and a push to ensure learning over enrolment. It is also suggested that high-stakes exams should be avoided in some circumstances as these can make learning outcomes and attendance worse.
28. There must be accountability from stakeholders at all levels of the issue: governments must commit financial resources, track progress and be transparent in results through annual reports. Attendance of both teachers and students should be tracked, parents and community members need to ensure they are always sending girls to school.
29. Technology can be used to support accountability, and as an enabler for education, For example, it can help collate data on enrolment and attendance, providing accountability and more accurate evidence-based results. It can be an incentive for students to attend school; it is innovative and highly interactive. However, it must be balanced appropriately with human interaction.
30. For technology to make a difference and have a real impact on the access and quality of education for all marginalised girls, the infrastructure needs to be more widely adopted and deployed; but equally to recognise the appropriate use of technology. The access to such resources is a challenge to developing countries and require a long-term strategy to influence the investment in such infrastructure.
31. It is important to think about how and who will monitor the resources allocated to ensure they deliver against the promise. Who has ownership? How to get adequate accountability? How to move from government declarations to real commitment on the ground?

Building a diplomatic campaign

32. The role of diplomacy as a persuasive and influential tool to drive greater awareness on the issue of girls’ education is acknowledged to be of tremendous importance. At an international, regional and domestic level, it requires continuous discussions amongst government officials.
33. Diplomacy must also take the form of continuous multilateral and bilateral negotiations with actors outside governmental institutions, at both local and regional levels. Civil society requires a clearer understanding of the different nuances of diplomacy and advocacy and sees a benefit in developing skills to activate the right diplomatic resources and mechanism when campaigning for girls’ education.
34. There is a divide between delivery and diplomacy, and a need to be frank and honest about the role that diplomacy can really play.

35. Several suggestions were put forward on how to build a diplomatic campaign:

- a key strength of diplomacy lies in creating a credible story and amplifying the message;
- engage at multiple levels; everyone is a diplomat in this space – and can all work to create change at any level from family to international;
- use public figures to raise awareness and build public support, not only celebrities but also local figures, including unusual ones: barbers, for example. Credibility is more important than celebrity;
- there is a need to tailor the message according to the audience; a wider audience requires a simpler message. In-depth messaging must be tailored to the community it is for;
- remember that the SDGs are for all children, not just those from low income countries. Diplomatic efforts should also be put into getting other middle and high-income countries on board to support girls' education;
- build a simple, clear message, putting into one sentence why this is important;
- put girls at the centre of the campaign. They are the experts - trust them here. Make the campaign with them and not about them;
- run a positive campaign, do not point fingers;
- identify opportunities to create 'golden moments' over a five-year period;
- focus on building an ecosystem for girls learning.

The balance of empowerment

36. It is important not to make assumptions. One study found that girls who report higher levels of agency and empowerment are at greater risk of dropping out of school.

37. It was suggested that:

- women mentors and role models are very important to create aspiration to stay in school;
- the voices and perspectives of girls is key and should be included;
- gender stereotypes should be removed from curriculum;
- social and emotional skills should also be developed by schools; they should not only be about academic achievement but development of the whole girl.

Local, regional and transnational partnerships

38. A deeper analysis of the local, national, regional and international stakeholders across the different sectors that affect quality education for girls should be considered as their buy-in could benefit a cohesive global campaign.

39. It is important to work together and collaborate on messaging. Too many different stakeholders risk promoting contradictory messages. Communicating a unified message advocating for quality education for girls involves strategic partnerships between governments, the private sector and the community.

40. The private sector also offers opportunities and limitations as a strategic partner in the global campaign for education. With the rise of corporate social responsibility, the private sector has become a significant actor. From the availability of key skills, the unlocking of new funding, the direct involvement with the local community and the export of managerial processes, the private sector is involved in a number of different partnerships alongside governmental agencies and CSOs with less bureaucracy when compared to the public sector. However, scaling and aligning efforts to prioritise can be

challenging. Putting an emphasis on a commercial model beyond CSR to amplify the effort driven by the private sector should be discussed in more detail.

41. It is suggested that the private sector, particularly ICT companies, are key partners who could play a greater role and be more aligned in a diplomatic campaign.

Conclusion

From the discussions and contributions, it was clear that the path to achieving 12 years of quality education for every girl is not clear-cut and requires context-specific approaches that engage with communities on the ground. Creating an overall enabling environment both outside and inside of the classroom is key to ensure that girls are not only attending school but learning effectively.

The FCO has a unique role to play in using diplomacy to build a coalition of actors from different levels to spearhead change that goes beyond the education sector for a more holistic view.

Achieving change on the ground will take time, and a long-term view is crucial. A great deal of the work will lie in tackling gender norms and social attitudes, championing women role models and making the benefit of educating girls clear to communities. In building a campaign, making space for girls' voices and experiences is important.

There is an urgent need to use all the resources and networks available to affect change and not to be disheartened by the scale of the challenge.

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"The cure for cancer could be locked in the brain of a girl who has just not been given the right to education"