

Let's use the Education for All (EFA) Movement to take IFUW's Goals of Education for Women into the Post-2015 Agenda

The idea of a universal right to education has been part of modern human rights discourse since it was enshrined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

In 1998, the IFUW Conference resolved:

1. to reaffirm the Resolution of the 24th Conference that NFAs work towards the implementation of, and urge their respective governments to affirm and implement the right of all people to education as asserted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN – 1948) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN – 1966);
2. to recommend to NFAs that they continue their efforts to overcome social, economic and political barriers to higher education and facilitate access to education for all people;
3. to recommend to NFAs that they campaign to ensure that women are not further disadvantaged by changes to higher education systems which are driven by economic considerations, rather than by values appropriate to education and research.

It's a Resolution that embodies two distinctive features of IFUW's mission: to work for education for all women of all ages and at more ambitious levels than the modest aims of Article 26 or Millennium Development Goal 2 (To ensure that all boys and girls complete primary school). In 1919 our founding mothers knew what was still to be the case in 1995 when the Beijing Platform for Action stated:

Discrimination in girls' access to education persists in many areas, owing to customary attitudes, early marriages and pregnancies, inadequate and gender-biased teaching and educational materials, sexual harassment and lack of adequate and physically and otherwise accessible schooling facilities."

They knew too, that even when education of girls was accepted, women were experiencing barriers to pursuing education to the limits of their capacity as well as further barriers to using their education for their own financial security and the public benefit. Until this situation ceases to exist, there is work for IFUW to do and there are strong grounds for arguing that we will do it best within the context of the Education for All movement.

What is EFA? The UN entrusted the pursuit of its education policies to UNESCO (the United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organisation), one of the UN bodies to which IFUW has representative standing. And out of the World Conferences on Education conducted by UNESCO emerged the Education for All movement (EFA). It was launched at the [World Conference on Education for All](#) in 1990 by UNESCO, UNDP (UN Development Programme), UNFPA (UN Population Fund) UNICEF (UN Children's Fund) and the World Bank. Participants endorsed an 'expanded vision of learning' and pledged to universalize primary education and massively reduce illiteracy by the end of the decade.

In 2000, the World Education Forum met in Dakar and, despite manifestly slow progress, re-affirmed their commitment to achieving Education for All by the year 2015. The six key education goals they identified were significant in that, while continuing to identify girls and women as a group whose

educational needs required special attention, they also introduced early-childhood, secondary and lifelong education and “quality” education into the aims.

To pursue Dakar’s goals the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report was set up. This:

tracks progress, identifies effective policy reforms and best practice in all areas relating to EFA, draws attention to emerging challenges and seeks to promote international cooperation in favour of education . . . While the Report has an annual agenda for reporting progress on each of the six EFA goals, each edition also adopts a particular theme, chosen because of its central importance to the EFA process. The publication is targeted at decision-makers at the national and international level, and more broadly, at all those engaged in promoting the right to quality education – teachers, civil society groups, NGOs, researchers and the international community.

It is undoubtedly our most important resource for knowing about the state of education world-wide. For more detail, and for copies of all Reports since 2002, go to

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/the-report-and-efa/>

Recognising the need to involve civil society, the Forum set up the Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education For All (CCNGO/EFA) as UNESCO’s key mechanism for dialogue, reflection and partnerships with NGOs in the framework of the EFA movement. The CCNGO/EFA network includes close to 300 national, regional and international member organisations. See

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/coordination-mechanisms/collective-consultation-of-ngos/>

In a related development, achieving the aims of Education for All was recognized as integral to UN programmes for development and sustainability at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, in Johannesburg . UNESCO, which became responsible for Education for Sustainability (ESD) as well as EFA, has a challenging vision of the implications of ESD:

Education for sustainable development (ESD) is not a particular programme or project, but is rather an umbrella for many forms of education that already exist, and new ones that remain to be created. ESD promotes efforts to rethink educational programmes and systems (both methods and contents) that currently support unsustainable societies. ESD affects all components of education: legislation, policy, finance, curriculum, instruction, learning, assessment, etc.

In the light of this IFUW would do well to attend to what happens at the forthcoming World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to be held from 10-12 November 2014

(<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco-world-conference-on-esd-2014/>).

Why might outcomes from this Conference matter to IFUW? We are approaching 2015, set as the year for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the education goals of both the Beijing Platform for Action and the Dakar Forum. Discussions on the UN’s post-2015 Agenda are already well advanced and there are arguments for narrowing the range of UN goals in order to increase the likelihood of their

being achieved. There is a question as to whether education will remain as a standalone goal based on a concept of rights or be treated as instrumental to a goal such as sustainable development (which itself can be seen as originating in the idea of a right to a healthy environment and a share of the world's goods). In the UN-sponsored forum World We Want (<http://www.worldwewant2015.org/>), we already have "Making Education a Priority in the Post-2015 Development Agenda", a document, based on community consultations during 2012-13. While the text of this document preserves emphases on gender discrimination and the needs of girls and women found in the historical documents mentioned above, terms like gender, girls, women do not appear in the document's Key terms listed on the home page of World We Want :

Tags: [Education](#), [Youth](#), [#education2015](#), [#post2015](#), [International Development](#), [development](#), [maternal health](#), [Millennium Development Goals](#), [poverty](#), [economics](#), [International economics](#), [Socioeconomics](#), [General Assembly](#), [Secretary-General](#), [United Nations](#), [UN General Assembly](#), [United Nations Development Group](#), [Open Working Group](#)

Topics: [Education](#), [Youth](#), [Youth](#), [Poverty](#)

Perhaps reflecting a sense that attention to gender issues is slackening, UN Women issued a call for a Standalone Goal of Gender Equality in the post-2015 Agenda. The discussion of this closed in early August and a report should be posted soon on the World We Want site. The IFUW Board did not take action on this because members felt that it had little chance of success and that it was more productive to pursue goals of gender equality within the context of particular issues such as health, employment and education.

The Board believes that our best chance of improving the education situation of women and girls is to continue to advocate on their behalf within the context of Education or All and in the 2013-16 triennium will make our contributions to events such as CSW and advocacy generally on that basis.