

## KEYNOTE SPEECH

# Gender Equity in Education for Girls Empowerment Urgent Call for Action

By

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Anita, an eight-year-old girl, was herding goats when she passed a school and heard girls and boys laughing. Curious, she peeped over the school wall and decided to go to school. Her father refused, saying they did not have enough money, and her mother kept silent. The school principal and Anita persuaded the father, and he agreed to pay her fees up to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade - then she would get married. Anita did well at school and began to assist other children in reading and mathematics. She noticed that teachers charged for extra lessons, so she too began to charge for her lessons, and raised enough funds to pay for her education after grade 5.

Teachers assisted her to complete her schooling and she decided to join a course on beekeeping. She was the only girl in it and got tongues wagging. "Look at that young woman walking with men!" they said. Her mother disapproved, but Anita became an expert beekeeper and sold honey to continue her education. But when she was 15 years the parents decided she should get married. She went on a hunger strike, so the father relented and allowed her to continue schooling.

Anita is now an inspiration to girls and women in the village. She learnt to drive a motorcycle and taught her mother to read and write at night. She got her teaching diploma and taught girls that if you work hard, express your views, and ask support from those who care, your *life can be as sweet as honey*.

## WHAT are the issues? What are the solutions?

- **Purpose** This innovative partnership is focusing on girls like Anita, that is why today we celebrate the innovative research partnership between Miske Witt & Associates, and the University of Minnesota's College of Education and Human Development, CARE-USA, and eight CARE Country Offices on the CARE Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative.
- This research partnership is taking on the challenges of gender disparities and girls' marginalization especially at the level of basic education and other spheres of development.

### What has the initiative found to be the barriers?

- The realities girls are confronted with, particularly in poor developing countries, in aspiring and striving for a better life.
  - Currently, one billion people around the world live in extreme poverty. Seventy percent of these people are women and girls.
  - Current estimates show 75-100 million children are out of schools. These are children who should be in primary school. At least 55 percent, that is nearly 41 million of them, are girls. These out of school and marginalised girls are concentrated in sub Saharan Africa (SSA) and South Asia.
  - Barriers working against girls especially in SSA, South Asia and parts of Latin America are partly owing to situations of forced relocations, poor economics, unstable politics, civil wars, gender relations, socio-cultural norms and the HIV/AIDS pandemic.
  - These barriers have resulted in the exclusion of many women from higher education; excluded from the freedom to work in certain fields or industries; excluded from the ability to own property or businesses and, in certain societies, excluded from fair treatment in courts. Taken together, what this all boils down to is discrimination.
  - As a result, many girls are being imprisoned in a poverty trap that few can escape from. Girls' future possibilities are then limited and are forced into a life of early marriage, illiteracy, multiple unplanned births, a high infant mortality rate, poverty and a decreased life expectancy.
- The above barriers result in loss of opportunity for each individual child. Denying education to girls corresponds to lower family incomes, higher maternal and child mortality, and a critical lack of participation and leadership from half the population.

- There is much work needed to reverse these backward notions, and that is why this partnership is so important.
- **Taking on the Challenges of Marginalization of girls in the basic education arena:** *Miske Witt and Associates Inc. (MWAI)* is a partner with the University of Minnesota to work in partnership with CARE-USA and eight CARE Country Offices from 2008-2010 on the CARE Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative.

## Solutions

### Partnerships

- The CARE Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative -PCTFI- is an initiative to improve the lives of the most marginalized girls internationally, especially with regard to basic education. The University of Minnesota and MWAI developed a public-private consortium called MIDECA (Minnesota International Development Education Consortium) in undertaking this research and development grant.
- **Research on gender equity** should be facilitated and included in policy debates in the eight countries. UNICEF should join hands with this partnership to invest in gender equity research particularly building the capacity of universities in the eight countries.
- **Cambodia's** intervention is called *Bending Bamboo* and is designed to address the underlying causes of indigenous girl's marginalization from basic education through a multi-focused intervention program. adoption of the Child Friendly Schools (CFS) framework, including enhancement of learning environments through the adoption of relevant Bilingual Education, systemic advocacy around the issues of girls' education.
- **Honduras'** interventions center on community engagement and promoting collaborative ventures between schools, families, and students for greater educational quality and alternative educational programming. a community based youth program, teacher professional development and a new early childhood initiative.

- The CARE team in **Mali** is focusing on improving the quality and relevance of non-formal education programs build the instructional skill sets of teachers in learner-centered methodologies thereby contributing to education quality.

**Cohort 2 countries are still finalizing their intervention plans, but the proposed interventions include:**

- **Tanzania's** interventions work with issues of work load and social status of girls by developing a community-based girls' leadership program that will target adolescent girls, both in school and out.
- **Bangladesh** has proposed working with School Management Committees to improve teacher attendance and quality of schools.
- **Ghana** intends to implement a girl to girl mentoring program in which older girls mentor younger girls to improve achievement and attendance.
- **India** has proposed a training package for teachers to improve learner-centered pedagogy and child friendly schools.
- **Malawi** has proposed a teacher training package to improve learner-centered pedagogies.

**Urgent Call for action? Carry the message forward in the field, Senate, House.**

### Advocacy

- Mainstreaming of gender equity into education sector plans, poverty reduction strategies,

### Increase Funding

- Governments committed to girls' and women empowerment like the USA should increase funding for girls programs, raise awareness among other funders about the importance of supporting girls-only programs.
- The new Obama administration has shown an commitment to girls' education in establishing a 7 billion Global Education Fund. Lobby

presidents of three developed countries to be champions of girls' education.

### Participation of girls

- Enable girls to in the process of their own empowerment and development of society (e.g., Anita)

**Why should they take action? Listen and take action on what I say.**

**Empirical studies show** that investing in girls' education in the developing countries yields high returns.

- Investing in just one girl empowers her, improves her family's welfare and, in time, reduces poverty within her community at large.
- There's a global movement for change on girls that is gaining momentum - let's not be left behind. Girls' education is at the heart of an economic revolution. Let's us all be strategic and comprehensive in our focus on investing in girls and young women because it will begin to assist us in building back from this current global recession, that is affecting these poor countries most of all.
- A 2008 World Bank research paper indicated that 10 percent is the average rate of return for an additional year of schooling across 100 countries. The rate of return for education tends to be much higher in developing countries. In developing countries, girls who receive a primary education see increases in their expected lifetime income potential of up to 10 to 20 percent per year of education.
- A 1997 report from the International Journal of Education Research has noted that greater education may also lead to mothers being more knowledgeable about family planning, using more contraceptives, reducing unwanted births and overall increasing their life expectancy.
- **The benefits to society:** When mothers have at least five years of education, their children will be 40 percent more likely to live beyond five years of age and 50 percent more likely to be immunized.
- Supporting girls' education provides a greater return on investment than investing in boys. This fact was discovered in a World Bank study, which indicates that once girls from developing countries reach adulthood, they

send an average of 90 percent of their income back home, as opposed to only 30 to 40 percent of the income men send home. Such an infusion of capital pays huge dividends with respect to improving the lives of these girls' families and reducing the level of poverty in their communities.

- Girls and women in particular are missing from the workforce, whereas boys and men are able to enter the labour force while women take care of the housework, and much of this work done by women is not recognized. Acknowledge women's contributions and address various barriers that have prevented girls from entering the workforce.
- A recent finding by the Nike Foundation and the World Bank has shown that the Kenyan economy shoulders approximately \$500 million USD annually due to early pregnancy, when it could see boosts of \$3.2 billion USD if it instead invested in girls' education and protected them from disease and early marriage.

### **How can they take action based on what they have heard?**

Clearly these initiatives and many more are required to assist girls to break free from their poverty to grow into empowered women with bright futures.

What is required is all our dedication to girls' education in words and deeds, the increased and widely communicated global awareness of the benefits of investing in girls will make the initiatives in these eight countries and other developing countries a reality.

*I would like to express my appreciation and admiration for the CARE colleagues based in the eight countries. You are the ones holding this important initiative together in the countries in the partners you are developing at country level with first and foremost the government and other stakeholders including parents, communities, school leadership and the girls and boys themselves.*