



Transforming Education in Crisis

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Beyond Barriers Statement



Education can be transformative and life-changing. However, globally, in the face of crises, governments often struggle to prioritize education due to competing demands and lack of capacity and resources. According to UNESCO, more than one in three countries spend less than 4% of GDP and less than 15% of total government expenditure on education, and only around 3% of humanitarian aid goes towards education in emergencies. In 2016, nearly 200 million adolescents were out of school. If trends of exclusion continue into 2030, only 1 in 3 girls in crisis-affected countries will have completed secondary school.

Education is a human right. It is also lifesaving and life-sustaining. Gaining access to secondary education not only places power into the hands of girls but it can shift the trajectory of their lives, allowing them to make informed decisions, learn and understand the world and their culture. Secondary education can provide avenues to life-saving information as well as protection and health support and services, including sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, WASH, mental health and psychosocial support. It can also enable access to comprehensive sexuality education and support the development of critical life skills.

Adolescent girls around the world want to take back their futures. They are demanding increased and dedicated financing and resources for gender-transformative, conflict-sensitive and inclusive secondary education that not only benefits them but also other historically marginalised groups.

To create a future that is feminist, equitable, decolonised, and anti-racist, it is time to listen. We must increase meaningful consultations with crisis-affected young people in all their diversity. We must recognise that the gaps we identify may not accurately represent all that is needed, so we urge all community workers, international and local organisations, and agencies to ensure that all decision-making processes include young people.

Feminist activists across the globe are working assiduously to champion education demands and to advocate for a future that prioritises financing for girls' secondary education, particularly in crisis contexts. We consulted with 94 girls, from four countries (Kenya, Palestine, Sierra Leone and Trinidad and Tobago), through 8 consultations.






Here is what they had to say:

- In some territories, access to education is costly and for families with little to no income, receiving quality education is not accessible. There must be an increase in the number of available scholarships with suitable and country-specific requirements for students to receive an education.
- There needs to be a robust community education outreach programme that seeks to eradicate the root of cultural violence and harmful practices.
- Due to increased online schooling, students must be given access to proper equipment such as books and digital devices in order to have a fair chance at online education.
- Financial and digital literacy training must be conducted for all students, teachers and school administrations.
- School infrastructure must be improved to include adequate accessibility structures for people with disabilities.
- There must be increased mentorship programmes for students who are seeking guidance.
- Decenter colonial languages and improve the way that the languages are taught to students who have a different mother tongue. In some places mother tongues are not recognised which results in exclusion, lack of accommodation for translation and a greater demand to learn a colonial language to become acceptable.
- Increase the frequency of girl-led consultations so that solutions and interventions are more informed and tailored to suit the actual needs of girls, globally.
- Provide psychosocial support to students, teachers and grassroots organisations.
- Provide access to safe and secure commute to schools and other learning institutions.

Transforming secondary education is no easy task as it requires constant unlearning and restructuring of existing social systems. Access to secondary education does not only consider availability but also, accessibility, affordability and also the quality of education being shared. Achieving an education system that caters to the needs of everyone requires all world leaders, organisations and individuals to listen, devise solutions based on consultations and ensure that they are all constantly revisited based on our ever-changing world.

Together, we can transform education in crisis and beyond.



This statement is part of the project Transforming Education in Crisis Beyond the Barriers by Transform Education, funded and supported by the Secondary Education Working Group.

In recognising these challenges, Transform Education (TE), a feminist led coalition hosted by the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, has created a project that centres the work and experiences of informal and formal feminist youth-led groups who are actively working to transform education for girls in crisis. This project aims to raise awareness on the needs and priorities of adolescents, as identified by adolescents themselves with a particular focus on secondary education. The project, Transforming Education in Crisis- Beyond Barriers seeks to explore the experiences of adolescent girls in crisis, devise solutions to combat the issues arising from budget cuts, and increase access to education that is gender transformative.

Acknowledgments | Labour of Love



This statement was led by Ashlee Burnett, Coordinator of Transform Education hosted by UNGEI and through the guidance, inputs, and demands of girls, adolescents and young people across the globe.

We are filled with gratitude and hope having concluded 8 girl led consultations in Kenya, Sierra Leone, Palestine and Trinidad and Tobago. We are inspired by the hard work and commitment of young feminist activists in these territories who give of their lives to create a gender just world.

We know that only through love can we really achieve transformation and we've seen this love shine through. We thank you for your work, we thank you for all the ways you show up, we thank you for your voices, for your stories, for your survival.

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