

Innovating for girls' education

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THIS year, United Nations in Bangladesh has decided to focus on the theme of 'Youth for Development' for UN Day 2013. On the International Day of the Girl Child on October 11, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, echoed the importance of focusing on youth, particularly on universal quality engendered public education, as key to providing a strong foundation for democracy, women's empowerment and the realisation of equality.

This year, during International Girl Child Day, UN Women emphasised that "innovating for girls' education" is important as we strive to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. In Bangladesh, girls have achieved school enrollment parity

at the primary level, but dropout rates at the secondary and tertiary levels remain higher for girls. The barriers standing in their way include poverty, gender-based discrimination, harassment, and violence. In addition, the

poor quality of education reduces the possible benefits of education for both girls and boys.

To break through these barriers, we must fully harness innovation and technology to reach poor and marginalised girls and improve the quality of education for all. UN Women Bangladesh strongly supports the UN secretary-general's Global Education First initiative and its three priorities – to put every child in school, to improve the quality of learning, and to foster global citizenship. Although UN Women is a new entity in UN Bangladesh, we have formed strong ties with our partners within Bangladesh civil society and government, and together we will work to improve the quality of learning so that every girl and boy can grow up with mutual

respect, dignity and equality.

Education can play a role in preventing violence against women and girls. Today, one in three women is subjected to violence, and more than half of all victims of sexual assault are girls under the age of 16. In Bangladesh, 66% of girls marry by the time they are 18. Early marriage often prevents continued education for girls. While there are many contributing factors to gender-based violence, one of the most mitigating factors is women's education.

UN Women is proud to announce the roll-out of a new initiative to prevent violence against girls. The unique curriculum, "Voices against Violence," will be delivered by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts among its 10 million members in 145 countries. The



curriculum was developed within a broader education and advocacy framework under WAGGGS' global campaign "Stop the Violence. Speak Out for Girls Rights," and has been tested among 1,500 members of the girl guiding move-

ment in 25 countries. Already, those who participated in the pilot programme have measured and reported changes in the level of knowledge and understanding of gender issues, and engaged parents and community members in dialogues and actions.

On UN Day and every day, UN Bangladesh and UN Women will stand up for the rights of women and girls. UN Women Bangladesh country office will promote youth activism to end violence against women, and encourage youth's political participation.

The writer is the Coordinator - Resource, Mobilization, Communication and Governance of UN Women. This op-ed has been written to mark UN Day on 24 October, 2013, which this year is focusing on Youth for Development.